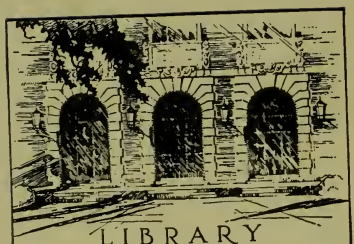
BEGGAR MY NEIGHBOUR



LIBRARY
OF THE
UNIVERSITY
OF ILLINOIS

823
G3116
v. 2

BEGGAR MY NEIGHBOUR

"Die Kunst reich zu werden, ist im Grunde nichts Anderes, als die Kunst sich des Eigenthums anderer Leute mit ihrem guten Willen zu bemächtigen."—WIELAND.

BEGGAR MY NEIGHBOUR

A NOVEL

BY

E. D. GERARD

AUTHOR OF 'REATA: WHAT'S IN A NAME'

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. II.

WILLIAM BLACKWOOD AND SONS
EDINBURGH AND LONDON
MDCCCLXXXII

All Rights reserved

823
G 311b
v. 2

CONTENTS OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

PART I.—(*continued.*)

CHAP.		PAGE
XV.	CLUBS AND HEARTS,	3
XVI.	FOLLOWING SUIT,	16
XVII.	TRUMPED,	30
XVIII.	OVERTRUMPED,	58
XIX.	A "BUMPER,"	81
XX.	WHOSE TURN,	100
XXI.	THE TRICK DISPUTED,	123
XXII.	THE LOSING SUIT,	140
XXIII.	PARTNERS PARTED,	155
XXIV.	THE WINNING SUIT,	164

PART II.

I.	UNDERPLAY,	171
II.	OUT OF THE GAME,	179

III. LUCYAN PLAYS HEARTS, ... 198
IV. LUCYAN PLAYS DIAMONDS, ... 220
V. A SMALL CARD, ... 233
VI. A SINGLETON, ... 244
VII. PAY TWO TO MY QUEEN, ... 269

PART I.

(CONTINUED.)

BEGGAR MY NEIGHBOUR.

CHAPTER XV.

CLUBS AND HEARTS.

"Herr, dunkel war der Rede Sinn."
—SCHILLER.

"A COLLIER, who had more room in his house than he wanted for himself, proposed to a Fuller to come and take up his quarters with him.

"Thank you," said the Fuller, "but I must decline your offer; for I fear that as fast as I whiten my goods you will blacken them again."

Marcin laid down the book from which he had been reading, and leant back exhausted.

"Well?" said Janina, looking up with a broad stare.

"Well?" repeated Marcin, "don't you see?"

"Well? I say: what about it?"

"But it is exactly like us; doesn't it strike you?"

"I don't feel struck at all."

"How strange! It struck me at once when I came across this book, and so I brought it with me, although my memory is usually very good for these things, but this was rather long to learn by heart."

He leant back again on the wooden bench, and stared up through the wooden trellis-work at the pale-blue sky above. There was a promise of spring in that sky, though it was still so early in March; there was a whisper of unborn violets in the breeze, a prophecy of apple-blossoms in the sunshine. But as yet it was but prophecy and promise; tantalising visions which awakened vague yearnings; poetry hovering through the air, while prose clung to the earth.

In the little back-yard of the apothecary's, there was nothing but prose and mud. The geese stalked about through mud, instead of over frozen ground; the rickety arbour in which Marcin sat opposite to Janina, looked as if it had been steeped in mud. The rosy-faced cherub who ushers in the Polish spring is a very muddy cherub indeed; even the flower-bunches which fill his chubby hands are mud-bespattered and dripping.

"Read that again," said Janina, who was busy smashing up old seltzer-water bottles with a hammer. "I didn't understand half you said." Round the foot

of the rickety arbour there was a half-finished decorative border, the exact nature of which would at first sight have defied conjecture. An outsider could scarcely of his own unaided faculties have discovered that these round and shining brown ornaments were nothing more than the turned-up bottoms of seltzer-water bottles, driven side by side into the ground. Janina's ingenuity had by no means been exhausted here; evidences of her inventive genius were visible everywhere. Not a bottle or box discarded by the apothecary was allowed to sink into inaction. It was pain to this irrepressible creature to see anything about her, if it were only a pill-box, stand idle. Stone jars which had once stared down from the shelves in the front shop, but had fallen from their high estate through some mishap, were pressed into the service of the ravenous geese, who now ate their mashed corn out of a broken vessel marked *Arsenicum album*, and drank their water out of another designated as *Opium purum*. It might have been thought, for instance, that a pair of old cracked scales, the balance of whose mind was no longer to be trusted as Æsculapian oracles, should have been allowed to rust away their old age in peace; but not so Janina. She had found work even for this crazy old pair, who now dangled with a tolerably bad grace from the ceiling of the arbour—a periwinkle plant drooping

from one, and a stunted fuchsia peering out of the other. Even the rustic dog-kennel, which stood in one corner of the yard (Jan Wronski always kept a dog, in hopes that it would one day go mad), betrayed, on close inspection, its medicinal origin; being nothing more or less than a pensioned medicine-chest turned on its side.

Marcin read the fable again, to an accompaniment of vigorous crashes. Each crash was a torture to Marcin and a delight to Janina: each time the hammer came down she laughed and he shuddered, and she, seeing the shudder, laughed the more and crashed the louder. At the end of the fable came an explosion of laughter.

"Ha, ha! that is capital!"

"Yes, I think it is a capital story," agreed Marcin.

"But it is just the contrary."

"The contrary of what?"

"Why, of us, of course," said Janina, bringing down her hammer again and drinking in with absolute pleasure the ear-rending crash which followed, just as a hardened general might enjoy the thunder of the cannon which is to create havoc among the enemy.

Marcin began to explain his views. "It struck me as being just like us; the first part of it, at least. You are the Collier, and I am the Fuller."

"Thank you for a pretty compliment!"

"I am sure a collier could not make more noise than you do, at any rate."

"And do you imagine that I am requesting you to take up your quarters here?"

"No, I don't suppose so," he admitted, beginning to lose his footing; "your answers always come smash upon me, just as if I was a seltzer-water bottle. That is not it; I saw it quite clearly yesterday, but I can't remember it to-day. I assure you it applies to the situation, if one can only find out how. I think it is you who must be the Fuller, and I the Collier."

"Very well, then, it is I who have to say: Thank you, but I must decline your offer."

Marcin pulled his moustache pensively. "That does not seem right either. I wish I could find the application. Colliers and fullers are opposite extremes, are they not? Well, we are opposite extremes also, and extremes meet,—you can't deny that? That's it!"

He folded his arms, and gazed at her triumphantly, but she did not look in the least conquered. She threw down the hammer, and snatched up the book.

"Let me have a look; I am sure you are making a mess of it. There, listen to this:—

"'Moral: *There can be little liking where there is no likeness!*' Why did you not read the moral aloud?"

"Oh, I never attend to morals; but is that really

there?" asked Marcin, in some distress. "Then I think the story must be stupid, after all; it works quite the wrong way."

"Didn't I tell you so?" she said, with a shrug and a pout, flinging down the volume of Æsop's Fables, face downwards.

"Well, it does not really matter," said Marcin, calmly possessing himself of the hand which had just flung down the volume; "there is a proverb, you know, which says, 'Birds of a feather flock together,' that applies. It is the opposite of the other, you know; so one of the two must be right."

"Yes; only that birds that are not of a feather don't flock together. What are you doing with my hand?"

"Comparing it to mine; they seem to suit very well."

"They couldn't be more different; there, let me go," she said, tearing herself away from him. "Ha! look what you have made me do!" as a button cracked off Marcin's cuff. "Now I wonder who is going to sew it on again for you,—that I really do."

"Never mind," said Marcin, contentedly; "life is a great deal too short to trouble one's head about shirt-buttons."

"A great deal too long to go through without them. Now, if you had behaved more civilly, I might have sewed it on for you."

"Can you sew?" he asked, gazing at her.

Janina put her hand into her pocket, and drew out a neat little card-board box. "No, that is papa's powders," she said, pushing it aside; "he never lets me go about without them, in case of my meeting a mad dog." A second box was produced, inscribed, "Camomile Tea," but which might just as well have been marked "Nécessaire," as it held Janina's scissors, thread, and thimble.

"How clever you are!" said Marcin, looking on in limp admiration, as, after a preliminary prick to his wrist, by way of brightening him up, she began fastening on the button. The compliment was acknowledged by another playful prick.

"How sharp your needle is!" he said, wincing; "sharp enough to go through a camel's eye, I should fancy."

"I wish you would not say such absurd things."

"And I wish you would not prick me."

"You need rousing," said Janina.

"I am sure you rouse me quite enough as it is," he sighed plaintively. "You ill-use me in such a dreadful manner; you smash bottles close to my ear, you pound my nerves with that club of yours, and you prick my wrist; and I am sure"—he looked apprehensively towards the bag of hydrophobia powders on the table—"I am sure you mean

to make me swallow some of those horrible powders presently."

"That's a capital idea," said Janina. "I had not thought of it before."

"Well, look here—I don't want to be ill-used any longer. I took a whole lot of bitter pills the other day, only to please you, and they gave me a most awful headache; and I don't want to be frightened any more with these salt-smelling things put under my nose. I hope you haven't got any about you at this moment. I say that I am ill-used, and I have enough of it. The jug goes to the well till it breaks the camel's back, don't you see?"

"Camels again," remarked Janina, biting off the thread.

"Well, don't you see what I want is that you should become my Collier, or my Fuller, or whatever it is?"

"Leave the fable alone," she said coquettishly, darting him a glance of fire; "can't you explain yourself properly?"

"I don't think I can; will you not help me?"

Janina pretended to be gazing at the stunted fuchsia overhead, which had apparently been weighed in the balance and been found wanting, for it brushed the ceiling, while the periwinkle trailed on the table.

"Help you? Why, *you* never help anybody."

"Did I not help you to pound alum the other day?" said Marcin, reproachfully.

"Oh, *didn't* you? and hadn't I a world of trouble in pounding it all over again? and then, after all, it had to be thrown away, because you had mixed up a lot of soda with it. My father begins to doubt whether you have the making of a medical student after all." She darted him another glance. "No, thank you; no more help do I accept from you."

"But I am not asking you to take, I want you to give; it is so difficult to explain one's self. I tell you that I want to put an end to all this."

"An end!" repeated Janina slowly, looking down deep into half a seltzer-bottle.

"When I say an end, of course I mean a beginning," elucidated Marcin.

"A beginning of what?" Janina's fingers were nervously squeezing some of the sharp brown fragments, and Janina's heart was thumping almost as loud as that dull thud of the mortar which reached them through the back-door of the house.

"Well, that is just what I want you to tell me."

She hesitated a moment, and squeezed the sharp fragment so hard that it cut her finger. Perhaps it was the pain of the cut which sent that red wave to her face.

"How can I tell you anything, when I don't know what you want to be told?"

"I want to be told how I can see you every day, often, always, you know——"

He waited a minute, and then she looked up boldly, though she was flushed to her very eyes.

"That can only be if you marry me. Is that what you mean?"

When she had said it, she plunged her hot face somewhat abruptly into the periwinkle-plant which hung so conveniently low, for she was a little frightened at herself.

"Yes, that is what I mean, I suppose; how clever you are! You have such good ideas," said Marcin, admiringly. "Yes, that is just what I mean; they expect it, don't they, usually? You see I was right, after all, about the Fuller and the Collier."

"'Thank you, but I must decline your offer,'—is not that what the Fuller says?" A pair of roguish black eyes were flashing at him through the periwinkle trails.

"But it is you who made the offer, you see, and I don't decline it. It was entirely your own idea."

"Lucky for you that I have got ideas; you never have got one of your own."

"I have got an idea at this moment, though," said Marcin, "and it is a good one too. Oh, nonsense! you

cannot get away, you know, and you are only frightening the geese."

The mud-bespattered cherub just then hovering through the air, laughed with delight at what he saw through the chinks of the rickety arbour-roof. A solitary thrush, busy trying his voice, just to see if he had not got hoarse during the winter, saw as much as the muddy cherub saw, and remembered, with a start, that he ought to be turning his mind to such things as twigs and straw-wisps, to soft hay and wool.

"You are very fond of me, are you not?" suggested Marcin, at the upshot of the last ten minutes.

"Yes; but I should like you better if you could manage to make a little more noise."

"But I think you make enough for two; and there is so much noise already in the world."

Janina shook her head. "Not half enough for my taste. I'll tell you what would make me quite happy. I should like to live in a big town, where carriages pass all day and all night; where there are plenty of bells, and drums, and music; and all the men in the house would need to have loud voices, and to wear good thumping, creaking boots, and all the women have their petticoats starched like paper."

"Well, that is not my way at all; my motto is, 'anything for a quiet life.' All the same, I will try to wear creaking boots when we are married; but,

look here, won't it be troublesome to get married? How do they manage it?"

"I'm sure I have never tried before," said Janina, with her nose in the air.

"I know what I will do," said Marcin, after a minute's reflection. "I'll ask my mother; she has been married, so of course she will know all about it."

The thrush, still practising his notes hard by, gave a sagacious nod, as much as to say: "I have tried it before, and I know all about it too; it's the simplest thing in the world, I tell you!"

"Your mother," repeated Janina, and she looked at him curiously; "perhaps your mother will not like the idea at all."

"Why not? Because you make too much noise? You would have to be quiet when she is there, of course. I don't know anybody else whom I could ask, unless you asked your father."

"That I certainly shall not. I won't tell him a word until it is all settled. He is quite contented now with the idea that you are a medical student; but if he took fright, he might become difficult to manage. Luckily he is deep in the composition of a new remedy just now."

Before the arbour was abandoned that evening, Marcin's handkerchief became adorned with a vigor-

ous knot. "That is to remind you to speak to your mother," said Janina, as she jerked the knot tight.

"I suppose he ought to speak to his mother," she muttered to herself, for she was a girl who much preferred getting what she wanted by fair and honest means.

"Mind you are here to-morrow to tell me what she says."

With these words ringing in his ears, Marcin went home.

CHAPTER XVI.

FOLLOWING SUIT.

"*Rosalind.* Then you must say.—*I take thee, Rosalind, for wife.*
Orlando. I take thee, Rosalind, for wife."
—*As You Like It.*

It was on Thursday evening that this conversation had taken place. Friday and Saturday passed, and Marcin did not reappear. The thrush, having begun to collect flakes of cotton, wool, strips of medicine-labels, morsels of coloured twine, with here and there a shred of sticking-plaster, was much surprised, while proceeding to build a highly medicinal nest, to see no more signs of billing and cooing in the arbour.

Sunday came, and no member of the Bielinski family drove over to the Tarajow church. On Monday Madame Bielinska appeared to be weaker than usual. Some medicine that had been ordered had not come, and Mademoiselle Robertine looked out anxiously for it during the day. It was late in the

afternoon when Marcin, lounging about the passage with both his hands in his pockets, was aroused by the sound of rapid and resolute steps on the gravel outside;—click, click, click they came through the wet. He seemed to know that sound, and in the next moment he was thoroughly startled by the bursting open of the door.

Janina, with a medicine-bottle in one hand, an umbrella in the other, a scarlet petticoat tucked up above her ankles, and a warlike stare upon her face, stood straight before him.

Marcin gazed at her fixedly and helplessly, opposing to her warlike stare nothing but a pale and harassed countenance.

"The medicine for your mother," she said, holding out the bottle. The silent house seemed to quake at the sound of her voice. Since Kazimir had gone away the week before, no such tone had been heard under this roof. She put the bottle into his hand. "There, take it, and come back to me here; do you understand?" She shook out her wet umbrella, and stamped about to get rid of the rain-drops. Marcin mechanically obeyed her, and returned to where she waited.

"And now," she began, "be so kind as to tell me what all this means."

"Not so loud," said Marcin; "my mother is asleep."

"Well, I cannot talk any other way—so just put on

your hat and let us have it out on the road; you can walk back a bit with me towards Tarajow. Where is your hat? There!" She clapped it down on his head, and dragged the bewildered Marcin out of the house.

As soon as they were at a safe distance from the windows, Janina spoke.

"Well, let us have your explanation now: where is that handkerchief with the knot upon it?"

"Gone to the wash," said Marcin.

"And I suppose your memory is gone with it; of course you forgot to speak to your mother?"

"Not I," said Marcin, with an air of offended dignity, "but I almost wish I had. I hate knots on handkerchiefs."

Janina snorted. "And why so, may I ask?"

"Because they are the beginning of misery."

"Make an effort to talk sense, if you please. You spoke to your mother, you say?"

"Unluckily I did."

"And what did she say?"

"She said that I was not."

"Was not what?"

"That I was not to do it."

"I understand." Janina audibly clenched her teeth. "She was angry, then, was she?"

"No, I should not call it angry," said Marcin, reflectively; "I think I should call it furious."

"Did she say anything else?"

"Oh, lots;" he shuddered, as if at some terrible recollection.

"Tell me what; speak, can't you?" she said, with a stamp on the wet ground. Her hand was on his arm, and all this time she was drawing him along the road towards Tarajow.

"Oh, she said that I would break her heart, and my father's heart, and my brother's heart, and my aunt's heart, and, in fact, everybody's heart; and that I would disgrace the family."

"She said that?" repeated Janina, turning very pale.

"Yes; and she would not see at all that it was a good idea, although I told her that it was your own idea——"

"Go on," said Janina, with bated breath.

"She said that you were an artful, designing girl."

"And you listened to all this quietly?"

"Well, what else could I do? especially as my mother fainted in the middle with agitation, and they thought she was dying, and sent for priests and doctors to finish killing her."

Janina walked on a minute in complete silence, which was a strange and alarming symptom.

"It would have been better," she said half to herself, "if we had got married first, and asked for her consent afterwards."

"Oh, but it is not my mother alone," said Marcin, "it is everybody else too,—it's Lucyan more than anybody; they all cursed and abused me, and left me no peace. I am sure," and he gave a rueful sigh, "I never before knew that marriage was such a terribly troublesome thing, or I should not have broached the subject at all."

Janina tramped on for another minute in silence. "And what did you say in answer to all this?"

"I said that I would not."

"That you would not marry me, you mean?"

"Of course; I cannot help it, you know. It is a pity, for it was a very good idea."

"And you meant what you said?"

"Well, yes, I suppose so."

"And what do you intend to do now?"

"Nothing," said Marcin, serenely.

She stood stock-still in the mud, wrenched her hand from his arm, and without warning or preparation, she burst into a storm of tears. It was a perfect thunder-plump of tears, so abruptly and heavily did it fall. At the sight of it Marcin stood still also, bewildered, distressed, and terrified.

"Look here; I really cannot help it, you know," he said, plaintively. "Surely you are not going to begin and abuse me too; I have had such a hard time of it at home; you have no notion how unpleasant it

is to be cursed; and just after they had all begun to forgive me, and I was hoping for a quiet life again."

"Get away! don't touch me!" screamed Janina, as he attempted to pull away her hands.

"Please, don't be in a passion; I am not going to give you up. Lucyan said I might go and see you as often as I liked, and that there was no harm in my amusing myself."

"He did not say that?" and her black eyes flashed fire upon him.

"Yes, he did; and he said that if I married you, you would never be allowed to come into the house, and that they would turn me out of it, and give me no money: and I could not live anywhere else but at home, you know; I am so used to it."

"You shall never see me again, if you do not marry me," gasped Janina, choking with sobs.

"Oh, but you cannot mean that, you know," and he began pulling down one of her hands. "You always say such violent things; you foam up just like one of those effervescing drinks, and you are as hot and sharp as a"——

"Mustard-plaster," suggested Janina grimly, through the midst of her tears.

"Yes, that is just it; how clever you are, and how lovely too! Your cheeks are quite white to-day. You

have been letting concealment, like a worm in a bud, feed on your damask cheek; I declare I have quoted it quite correctly. There, you must let me kiss you; there is nobody on the road."

"You shall not kiss me until you say that you did not mean all you said. Oh, Marcin, how could you!"

With the same abruptness that her tears had begun, they also ceased. She had dried her eyes vigorously, but her breast was still heaving as she turned her face up to him. She had never looked so pretty as at this moment, with her baby-mouth quivering, her face pale with excitement, and her black eyes clouded with tears. Marcin kissed her first, and then began to explain. "What is the use of talking about that? We had better drop the subject, don't you think?"

"How dare you"—she was beginning with another flash of passion; but she checked herself, before she had said—"how dare you insult me?" The man standing before her did not look in the least as if he meant to insult her. He only looked limp and helpless, and thoroughly scared. His mother had frightened him, and his brother had frightened him. That immovable limpness would be proof against any amount of fire and passion. He must be managed some other way.

"I don't see why we need make such a fuss about

it," Marcin was saying; "life is too short for all these fusses. It only makes people curse you and say uncomfortable things; and I think, after all, that we were very comfortable as we were before."

"And you imagine that we could go on just as before?"

"Of course; why not? All I ask for is a quiet life; and if I am to have scenes every day, it would be exactly like living with a drawn sword round one's neck."

"Your life would be very quiet if you had never to come to Tarajow again."

"Oh, but that will not do at all; you can't have meant what you said."

"I did mean it," said Janina, "and I am as good as my word. Now, what do you intend to do?"

"Nothing," said Marcin; "I only ask for a quiet life, and to see you as often as I like; it is rather like sitting between two stools, isn't it? or else like having your cake and eating it."

Janina looked at him and sighed with discouragement. This passive obstinacy was far more baffling than any active obstinacy. She walked on some paces, with a fixed frown on her face, making snatches at the twigs in passing. Click, clack, went the resolute steps; swish, swash, went the swinging petticoats —and now, bim, bam, bom, broke in another sound

over the scene. It was a distant sound, floating dismally across the wet and cheerless fields: the bell of the Tarajow church was tolling.

"There is one way," said Janina, slowly, "only one way I can think of by which you can both eat your cake and have it."

Marcin looked at her admiringly. "I always said you were clever—I knew I was right."

"But it is not very easy."

"Shall I have to take much trouble?" he asked, apprehensively.

"If there is any trouble, I will take it. Listen." She stood still again on the road and laid her hand on his arm. There was no one within sight at the moment; if there had been, even a distant spectator would have been struck by the energy of her gestures and the rapid movements of her head. There was no one within sight; but just round the bend of the road there was a figure coming along, striding with long steps through the mud.

Marcin listened with a dawning smile on his face.

"How clever you are!" he said again. "Do you think it is really worth while?"

"I have told you the alternative."

"But will it not be very hard work?"

"Leave that all to me, I do not mind hard work."

"Very well; but you must not let yourself get

pale and look like a worm in a bud. And then, do you think it will be safe? Women cannot keep secrets."

"I will swear it to you on the crucifix if you like; but, Marcin, you must promise me something in exchange."

"Must I? What sort of thing? What an uncomfortable sound that bell has!" said Marcin; "it makes me feel quite shivery."

She raised her head sharply and listened—bim, bam, bom, it tolled across the fields. "That is the passing-bell," she said. "Somebody must be dying, or is dead; I wonder who? We have had no medicines sent for to-day."

"It is not my mother, I hope," said Marcin, turning pale.

"Nonsense! how could it be? We have only just left the house. Never mind that bell now, but listen to me. We may be interrupted any moment;" and so in truth they were. Before the last word had been said between them, and while the passing-bell still tolled out mournfully, Janina's quick eyes had espied a black figure through the bushes. "A Jew," she whispered. "No Jew should see us together. Do not forget!" She was gone before Marcin had realised that she was going, and had vanished between the thick bushes.

Marcin looked about him, cast one glance at the approaching Jew, and turned his face languidly homewards. That tolling bell awoke in him a feeling of vague uneasiness. He felt an indistinct curiosity to know who it was that was dying. Should he ask that Jew who was abreast of him now at the other side of the road? Marcin looked at him; the Jew made an abject inclination, and Marcin recognised the factor, who had been absent for many weeks. Aitzig Majulik always knew everything. He would be sure to know for whom that bell was ringing. Marcin was half inclined to put the question, because of his curiosity, and half reluctant, because of his native indolence. It was always an effort for him to address anybody, and just now he was exhausted with talking. In the end the reluctance had the upper hand, and Aitzig Majulik was suffered to pass on ahead in silence.

Aitzig Majulik was walking fast, and he reached the Wowasulka house long before Marcin. He wiped his boots and entered, opened a door, and looked in. When he had opened several doors in succession, he opened the one of the room where Lucyan was sitting.

Lucyan looked up and was surprised at the sight of the Jew, though he never betrayed surprise in his face. "You are back from the Bukowina, Aitzig; your business has taken you long."

"Yes, gracious Pan, I am back; but there is no rest

from business for poor old Aitzig. It is not as if Aitzig were a fortunate man like Naftali Taubenkübel," and the factor gave a jealous sigh. "All the horses to be stabled, and the hay to be bought; and when I went off to Lodniki with the three pair of work-horses ordered, there was no rest for me there, and I was sent off at once to have the passing-bell rung (and only twenty kreuzers for my trouble!) Ah, you don't hear it ringing from here!"

"Has any one died at Lodniki?" asked Lucyan, indifferently; "a workman, an overseer?"

"The gracious Pan is pleased to appear ignorant," said the Jew, with a stare of astonishment. "Who is Aitzig Majulik, that he should know better of such things?"

"None of your whining rubbish. Who is dead, I ask you?"

"Who else should be dead but the noble gentleman himself, the noble Pan Rogdanovics, to be sure?"

"Rogdanovics dead!" repeated Lucyan, incredulously.

"He died this afternoon, if it so please you."

"When?"

"Two hours ago. Time enough to have put him under ground," added Aitzig, accustomed to the telegraphic rapidity with which his own nation dispose of their dead. No doubt two hours, instead of shock-

ingly short, seemed to him an indecently long time for the soulless clay to linger above ground.

"Was it illness or accident?" asked Lucyan.

"Accident more than illness, gracious Pan. Pan Rogdanovics was as strong as the great Samson this morning, and this afternoon he broke a blood-vessel over his new machine for the tree-roots. They were just closing his eyes as I left the house."

Aitzig spoke in a business tone; and Lucyan, who thought that he had come here merely to impart the intelligence, expected to see him slink out again. But Aitzig stood there still, picking at his ragged sleeve, and shuffling about his bony feet.

"That is all, then?" said Lucyan, stunned in spite of himself by the sudden shock of the news.

"That is all," repeated Aitzig, in a tone which convinced Lucyan that that was not all.

"You can go, then."

Aitzig coughed, and offered another remark. "It is a very melancholy piece of news that poor Aitzig has had to give, and the gracious Pan was well acquainted with the family."

"Well, what of it?"

"The gracious Pan has visited that house often during the last weeks."

"People are talking, then," said Lucyan, coolly. Then, as Aitzig coughed again,—"Don't make a

mystery of it, Aitzig. I know what people say. They say that I am paying my addresses to Rogdanovics's daughter. Supposing they are right, what then?"

"Oh, nothing then. Who is Aitzig, that he should——"

"If you have anything of importance to say," remarked Lucyan, sternly, "shut the door, and come here."

"It is of no importance to me, gracious Pan."

"Shut the door and come here," repeated Lucyan. His secret thought was: "That old sinner has something to disclose. Surely the father's death cannot have affected the daughter's fortune?"

Aitzig slank towards the door, closed it softly, and returned to where Lucyan sat.

CHAPTER XVII.

TRUMPED.

> Listen, O Cyclops, for I am well skilled
> In Bacchus, whom I gave thee of to drink."
>
> —SHELLEY.

THE bell of the Tarajow church was hard worked in these days. It was not more than a week after it had been muffled in an old fur cap, and tolled for Rogdanovics, that the fur cap was put on again, and the rope was pulled for poor Madame Bielinska. It had rung out between whiles also, without the fur cap, but in a quiet, discreet fashion, as if half ashamed of the sound of its own tongue; and none had troubled themselves to inquire the reason. The neighbourhood had quite enough to talk about with the two deaths that had occurred within one week. Rogdanovics's death was by far the most grateful subject for gossip: it was a warning example held up by all pessimists for the edification of all sanguinists; it was a lesson to all persons with progressive ideas—a lesson which taught

them the folly of attempting to do otherwise than as their forefathers had done. The choleric old gentleman was particularly grim. Had Rogdanovics broken a blood-vessel in a good, respectable, old-fashioned style—as he might have done in lifting a heavy sack of potatoes, for instance—then his death would deserve to be called a lamentable accident; but as it had happened over a new-fangled machine for pulling roots out of the ground (instead of setting a dozen peasants, with pick-axes, to the job), it could only be looked upon as the finger of Providence, who had decreed that the adventurous man should go to his grave with all his unhatched, hatching, and half-hatched schemes in his brain, and without setting eyes upon even a single white post to mark the future railway. Popular opinion, on the whole, approved of the conduct of the orphaned daughter, who, although she gave up the lease of Szybalin, went on living in retirement at Lodniki, in company with her cousin and her aunt, come from Krakow to join her.

The second death was by no means as interesting. Everybody had known all winter that Madame Bielinska was dying; the only surprising point about the matter was that she should have lived longer than her robust neighbour Rogdanovics. Neither was there anything especially interesting about the way in which her property was distributed: it could only interest

the heirs themselves. The way in which Madame Bielinska had disposed of her property was very simple: she had left Wowasulka in equal shares to her three sons. It was her formally expressed wish that her eldest son, Kazimir, should take the management of the estate, paying to his brothers their share of yearly profit. Failing Kazimir, the reins were to fall to Lucyan. Clearly it was Lucyan's duty to put the state of the case before his brother, transmitting their mother's wishes. This duty Lucyan fulfilled to the very letter. In the note which announced the death, there was no mention of business; but scarcely another fortnight had elapsed when a long business letter reached Kazimir. He was urgently exhorted to abandon his military career, and come home to take the management of the estate, which, at this spring season, was particularly in want of careful administration. He, Lucyan, did not wish to take any responsibility upon himself, as his brother was now virtually the head of the family. Some questions, indeed, were so pressing, that they required immediate attention. What, for instance, were Kazimir's wishes with regard to the new-born calves? How many did he wish to have kept for breeding, and how many sold for butcher's meat? What grain should be substituted for the barley that was not promising well? The usual Wowasulka luck had brought another disappointment: a

whole litter of pigs had failed; Lucyan was afraid that this news would much vex his brother. And then about the lease of the Propinacyas, which would be run out in about two months,—what were Kazimir's intentions? Did he not think that Naftali was getting a little too old for the business? And to whom should the lease be given instead? Aitzig Majulik had been hungering after it for years; but was he not rather too low a stamp of Jew? &c., &c., &c.

It was just about a fortnight before the declaration of war that Kazimir received this letter. Of course Lucyan could not foresee the peculiarly irritating moment at which his epistle was destined to reach his brother's hands. Kazimir's hands, in fact, were just then deep grey of colour, and oily to the touch. Warlike preparations have their prosaic as well as their poetical side, and the business of spending a whole forenoon in reviewing the bridles and bits of a detachment, scrutinising and fitting it each in turn to the most appropriate horse, leans undoubtedly towards the prosaic.

Eighteen bridles and eighteen bits had passed through Kazimir's hands that morning, and eighteen more were waiting for their turn—not to speak of a looming background of boots standing in rows, each waiting to be married to a corresponding pair of feet, under the vigilant eye of the lieutenant. What wonder, then, that

the unpromising barley fell upon rocky soil, and that the melancholy bereavement in the pig-sty was dismissed with an expression as heartless as unfortunately it was profane?

The answer to that delicately pink and sweetly scented epistle (alas! now smudged with unsightly smears) was written in a white heat of hurry—in an interval snatched between the bridles and the boots. "Do exactly what you like," wrote Kazimir; "and for heaven's sake settle the pigs and the barley and the Propinacya for yourself! I have never set eyes on Naftali, and don't care whether he is old or young. As for giving up my career, unless you wish me to call you out, you won't mention it again. I know that I make a good soldier, and I know as certainly that I should make a wretched farmer." Kazimir, as he wrote this, thought of the first and last taste of farming he had had, and shuddered at the recollection. "I wonder you have the courage to suggest such a thing at this moment of all others, when we are living in daily and hourly expectation of orders to cross the Mincio. Everybody is excited and confused: the ladies of the regiment are shedding tears in advance. One lady in particular—the young wife of my captain, who is as well my best friend in the regiment—is in a state of great agitation. Having been married scarcely three months, she will not even hear of the word 'separa-

tion,' and declares that she will follow her husband to Italy at any price. The women are shocked, and the men laugh at her behind her back; for my part, I must say that I admire her spirit. She is a golden-haired beauty—warm-hearted and charming."

"A golden-haired beauty—warm-hearted and charming," repeated Lucyan, as he folded up the letter.

A fortnight later war was declared, and almost immediately the army crossed the Mincio. The *carte-blanche* which Kazimir had given his brother secured him peace of mind for some time to come. Letters from Lucyan reached him from time to time on the march, and were read by Kazimir on horseback and off horseback, in the tent and by the road-side, on the eve and on the morrow of engagements—lost engagements usually,—for the reverses of the Austrian army began early. In one of these letters there was a hint which made Kazimir think of the last conversation between him and his brother. It did not surprise him to see that Lucyan's thoughts should still be directed towards matrimony; but he was a little surprised that he should even thus indirectly refer to it so soon after their mother's death. He was yet more astonished at another letter which reached him early in June.

It was almost on the morrow of the fatal day of Magenta that Kazimir received this letter. It had

been his first battle, and also his first serious disappointment in life. He had looked forward to such a day as to a field of certain glory, even if bought by many a painful moment. So resolved had he been to do something brilliant and heroic, that he never doubted his chance. Visions of the *Theresien Orden* had floated before his mind,—it needed but that to place him on the exalted height on which a suitor for Xenia's hand should stand. And when the day itself had come, it had brought him only a sort of helpless inaction, joined to a keen sense of his own insignificance. As for glory, he had secured nothing but a bullet-hole through his sleeve; while for pain, he had had the terrible shock of seeing the most beloved of his comrades fall mortally wounded on the field. He was depressed, but not discouraged, and still held firmly to that vague and undefined heroic act which as yet was but a dream. This was only the beginning, after all; in the months to come, there would be many more fields on which his laurels could grow.

In this state of mind, therefore, he was, when he received Lucyan's letter. It was brought to him one evening in the camp, where the hussars were bivouacking outside the walls of a small Italian town. By the light of the Italian sunset Kazimir read this letter:—

"CHER KAZIO,—How or when this will reach you, I do not know, but the question I have to put before you is so urgent and so pressing, that it cannot possibly stand over till the conclusion of the war. The long and the short of the matter is this, *I cannot any longer undertake the management of Wowasulka.*

"However willing I am to oblige you to the fullest extent of my power, you must confess that every man has the right to think of himself in the first place. If you do not intend to become a farmer yourself, you would require to appoint a competent overseer. Such a choice is so delicate and critical a matter, that I could not undertake the responsibility. The exact man on whom you fix may make the whole difference of ruin or prosperity. Perhaps you have thought of some one yourself? or if not, you must immediately do something of the sort. The expense, of course, is very great, as the salary could not be less than three hundred florins; nevertheless, with your small experience, I think this course inevitable.

"As for the reason of this turn of affairs, it may surprise you, though I scarcely think it will, after my former letters. (By the by, I wonder whether more than one in two of my letters reach you?) The truth is, I shall soon have affairs of my own to manage; I am standing, in fact, on the brink of matrimony.

Naturally, I should have preferred that our time of mourning should be passed; but in Mademoiselle Rogdanovics's present unprotected state, it would be undesirable to defer the marriage later than August, or at most September. Much as I regret it, I fear that you will not be yet home by that time: this war apparently will be a long affair, and in all probability will drag into winter. You will understand, therefore, why you must necessarily take some decisive step. In the natural course of things Marcin should have the management, but I should as soon give it to a new-born babe as to him. He does not seem intended for a world as practical and distinct as this. It always seems to me as if he had got into it by mistake, and that, somewhere or other, his own world must be a world of mist and clouds, where nobody ever works, and where everybody always talks in mixed metaphors. Did I mention, by the by, in any of my former letters, that he electrified the household by proposing to marry the apothecary's daughter? He was laughed out of it, of course, and his first attempt at matrimony will, no doubt, be his last.

"Talking of the fair sex, what is your captain's golden-haired wife doing? I really must compliment you on your powers of description. The picture you draw is so charming, that I cannot help feeling an interest in the original. Your usual luck in such

matters follows you everywhere; golden-haired or brown-haired, to all you seem equally irresistible. If I were not cast in a different mould myself, I should be almost inclined to envy you; as it is, I am satisfied with the less brilliant *rôle* of a quiet and steady domestic man.

"Perhaps you will find time, in the intervals between your battles, to send me a line with a good wish for my marriage; although, according to my opinion, good wishes cannot alter the case; there is but one sort of marriage which I consider a desirable one. My *fiancée* begs me to say that she hopes you wish her well. I have no doubt you do, for you and she used to be very good friends, I think.

"Have your laurels begun to sprout yet? I hope to read soon of your being decorated by the *Theresien Orden*.—Your affectionate brother,

"Lucyan Bielinski."

This letter, coming straight upon the back of Magenta, seemed to aggravate the defeat immensely. The news of Lucyan's engagement, though scarcely quite unexpected, brought a shock of surprise, which, at any other moment, would have been still more startling. He must find time to write a line of congratulation, for of course he wished Vizia well with all his heart. To the marriage in itself he had nothing to

object; but then, as to this business of overseers and management, what, in the name of the troublesome, was he to do? How he wished that no such place as Wowasulka existed in the world!

With this fervent desire in his mind, he pushed the letter back into its envelope, and ordered his horse to be led out. He had no time to consider the question at this moment; he was bound to ride into the town, and see what he could do for the comfort of an unfortunate woman. That golden-haired beauty to whom Lucyan had half-jestingly referred in the letter (Kazimir merely shrugged his shoulders as he read the passage), was now a widow. She had arrived in time to receive the last embrace of her husband, fallen at Magenta; and with his dying breath the captain had consigned his weeping and unprotected wife to Kazimir's care.

In the upper room of a dirty and ruinous little inn he found her, pacing the floor in a frenzy of grief. Perhaps the very misery and poverty of her surroundings fired Kazimir's eagerness to help. Eyes filled with tears were never raised to him in vain; and when those eyes were blue, their chance was all the better. Of course they were not to be compared to another pair of blue eyes, into which he had looked now three months ago,—but for the sake of the association alone they deserved his sympathy. He was

ready to do anything for this distressed widow. He offered to write all her letters for her, he listened patiently to the sobbed-out list of relics which she wished to keep for ever. It was some time before he could prevail upon her to take a little refreshment and rest; and he left her with the promise of riding five miles next morning in order to give verbal directions as to the particular shape of cross for the captain's grave. After all, had the widow been wrinkled instead of blooming, and sixty instead of twenty, Kazimir would have ridden those five miles all the same.

"Poor child! poor child!" he sighed, as with a heavy heart he descended the creaking stairs. So exhausted was he with the excitement and fatigues of the last days, that he stumbled over the lowest steps. "This will not do," he said to himself. "If I do not take some rest, I shall not be fit to sit in the saddle to-morrow." There was an open door beside him, and Kazimir walked into the bar-room and asked for a glass of wine.

"There is *wine* and *wine*," said a jovial voice beside him. "Your request savours of vagueness. Specify your wishes; ask for a glass of *vino santo*, and if you do not fancy yourself a god sipping nectar, you may put a bullet through my head, and welcome."

Kazimir turned at the sound of the voice, though he had recognised its first tone. This broad, red-faced,

red-haired man, with the sharp twinkling eyes, twinkling, as it were, with a sort of good-natured cunning, was a comrade of his; not exactly a brother of the sword, being the *Auditor*, or military lawyer of the regiment. That rotundity of outline, and more than rosy hue of complexion, suggested, at first sight, a prosperous farmer, or a well-fed butcher. But the eyes, even though obscured at this moment by the fumes of the so delicious nectar, were distinctly too acute to belong either to the farmer or to the butcher. He was, in fact, that most paradoxical of all paradoxical things—a jolly lawyer.

"Here is your proper place," he cried to Kazimir, who, nothing loath, sank down on the wooden bench. "I have ordered another bottle of the divine fluid for myself. My notion is to wash away the disgrace of our arms; what do you say to the idea? good notion, eh? Make the most of our time, I say; serves those confounded blockheads right if we run their cellars dry before they get rid of us. The wine is too good for the nation, that is what I say"—and the Auditor, bringing down his hand with a thump, threw a vindictive glance towards a further table, where a group of swarthy Italians were drawn together discussing in whispers, and with looks of sullen triumph on their faces, the events of the last few days.

"Ah, here is the angel of the bottle! collect yourself

and be reverent. I have not lost much time in hitting it off; instinct guides me. What does it matter how bad the walls are, as long as they hold such a gem as this? What do you say to it?"

"Not bad stuff," said Kazimir, absently, for his thoughts were very far from *vino santo* at that moment.

"In low spirits, poor boy! no wonder!" The Auditor's jolly face grew suddenly grave and almost sober. "Ah, poor Bároly! To think of all the scrapes I have helped him through, and to think that it is but four months since I drew out his papers for him, and sent him off to get married. He was the twenty-seventh man that I have married out of the regiment; they marry on an average at the rate of nearly one and a half a-year—and they separate at the rate of one and a quarter in four years. Poor Bároly! How is *she* bearing up?" and the Auditor jerked his fat red thumb toward the ceiling.

"She is half mad, I think," said Kazimir.

"She is my ninth widow," said the Auditor, reflectively. "Nine widows in twenty years. About half the number marry again. She would knock me down if I suggested the idea now, but in a few years, we shall see. I think she is the most frantic of any—it is by far the hardest case of the lot. So sudden, too! I had not even time to draw up his will for him.

Would you not like to have your will drawn up, by the by?"

"Much obliged,—no, thank you."

"Well, as for poor Bároly, he had not much to leave to anybody except that wretched yellow dog, which has been making me shiver with its whine all evening." He pointed towards a lemon-coloured setter stretched asleep on the boards.

"I turned him out of the room up-stairs," said Kazimir, "because Madame Bároly could not bear to look at him."

"And he slank in here and put himself under my protection, as the only familiar face he could see."

"I shall have to keep the poor beast, I suppose," said Kazimir.

"Here Trappisto!" but Trappisto lay exhausted on the ground, his flanks slowly rising and falling, while, from the shiver of his yellow cheek, you could almost have sworn that he was sobbing in his dream.

That forsaken dog somehow brought the loss of his comrade more keenly home to Kazimir. He turned his face to the window, but here straightway his eyes fell on a wounded horse which some soldiers were leading past to shoot outside the town. There was no escaping from the sadness which brooded over everything. He leant his head on his hand and sighed heavily.

"Now we must stop this," cried the Auditor, in a voice thick with emotion and wine. "Cheer up, man! these are the chances of war! Why, I have myself lost, what with battles and fevers, as many as——"

The Auditor's utterance had become so indistinct, that Kazimir could not make out whether he had lost fifteen, or fifty, or five hundred men.

"Seen them all die, I tell you, and most of them without making their will. Sure you don't want your will made? Quite sure? Can't do anything else for you? Debts, marriage-settlements?" The Auditor took another gulp of *vino santo*. "Why are you not getting married, for instance? The twenty-eighth on my list you would be; there now!" and he leant back with his hands in his pockets, and gazed at Kazimir unsteadily, as if challenging him to resist that inducement.

"Talking of marriage,—my brother is going to be married," said Kazimir, all at once remembering that letter in his pocket.

"Ah, your brother? Pity he is not in the regiment; out of my jurisdiction entirely. Anything wrong about your brother's marriage, that you look so black about it? Want it stopped, perhaps?"

"Oh no; the marriage is all right: it is the consequences for me that all are wrong."

"In a scrape?" The Auditor drew himself confidentially nearer to Kazimir. "Have always been waiting for this; knew that you would get into a scrape some day, and that I should have to get you out of it. You would be the—— no, the scrapes of the regiment are the only things I have given up numbering; sands of the sea, sands of the sea,—that's what they are! Not in a scrape, you say? What a pity!" His face fell considerably, and rather dejectedly he poured out another glass of wine.

"No, I am not in a scrape," said Kazimir; "but I am in a devil of a mess all the same."

"That sounds better;" the Auditor smacked his lips. "Now, let us hear the case."

"I do not think that I have time," said Kazimir. "I must be back in the camp directly, or I shall find all the men starved, and all the horses run away."

"Nonsense! there is no hurry; both men and horses are so dead-beat that they will be thankful to lie down on the ground and sleep. Let us hear your case."

Kazimir hesitated. He knew that the Auditor was both good-natured and shrewd; and he knew also that, up to a certain point, he grew more good-natured and more shrewd in proportion as he grew more tipsy. What made him hesitate now, was the question whether that certain point had not already been passed. On

second thoughts he reached the conclusion that the Auditor's head, even muddled by wine, would be clearer and cooler than his own head unmuddled. He took out the letter and handed it over.

It was strange to see the change which came over the man. The hand which he held out for the letter grasped it unsteadily, and could scarcely fold out the paper at the first effort; but the moment the spectacles were on his nose, and the paper spread before him, his tipsy face settled down resolutely to the business. Slowly he read the letter, word for word, taking long slow sips from his glass, but never moving his eyes from the lines. The low windows stood wide open to let in the sultry evening air; and with the evening air there came in many sounds, peaceful and warlike, from the street: peaceful, when a child's careless shout reached the room, or when a church-bell tolled the evening *angelus;* warlike, when a baggage-waggon lumbered past, and a mounted hussar —horse and rider white with summer dust—clattered after it over the rough pavement. But not by any sound in the street, or any sound in the room, did the Auditor allow himself to be disturbed. Until he had read the last word, he did not change his position.

"Well," asked Kazimir, as he laid down the paper, "what am I to do about this wretched overseer business?"

The Auditor looked at Kazimir, filled up his wine-glass, leant back, and observed, "That strikes me as being a very clever letter."

"Yes, Lucyan is the cleverest of us three," said Kazimir, with some pride.

"Your brother seems in a great hurry about marrying."

"Why should he not be in a hurry?" asked Kazimir, all the more defiantly that the same thought had struck him, and already half repenting having handed out the letter. The actions of the family should not be criticised outside the family circle. Such a thing went straight against his notions of chivalry.

"Any special ground for the hurry?" inquired the Auditor coolly, with his head lolling back against the wall, his eyes on the ceiling, and his hands in his pockets.

"Of course there is; she has lost her father, and being an orphan, is in want of protection."

"Why should not your brother pick out an overseer for you? Do not see the force of his arguments at all."

"I cannot ask Lucyan to do more for me than he has already done," said Kazimir with a little heat. "He has been uncommonly good-natured as it is."

"Capital thing, to have an uncommonly good-natured brother," observed the Auditor, still staring

upwards. "Well, give me a night to think over it; I will tell you to-morrow." He brought his gaze down from the ceiling, and began folding back the letter into the envelope. "Wait till to-morrow; I don't feel inspired to-day."

"I wish I were rid of the whole business," exclaimed Kazimir.

"Why, here is a second sheet inside; you didn't show me that; marked 'private,' I suppose, eh?"

"I never saw any second sheet," said Kazimir. "If the letter had been from aunt Robertine, I should have supposed it was one of her safety sheets. Where is it?"

"Here it is, and it is not marked private either. Old eyes are sharper than young ones, it seems."

Kazimir took the sheet and read it, while the Auditor watched his face over the edge of the wine-glass. The clouds on Kazimir's brow were slowly clearing, they were quite cleared by the end of the page, he dashed down the paper on the table and looked up triumphantly.

"Thank heavens, the matter is clear as daylight now! here is the way out of everything; read that!" Whatever reluctance he might have felt about showing the first half of the letter, there could be no ground for concealing this. Here was a distinct, above-board and brotherly proposition, which should

be met in the same manner that it was tendered, with plain-spoken frankness.

"Keep your head cool," said the Auditor, as he applied himself to the sheet; and perhaps by way of keeping his own head cool, he swallowed another half-glass of wine. This sheet formed a postscript to the letter itself, and bore a date of one day later. To all appearances it was the expression of an after-thought, and this after-thought bore the stamp of a different mood.

"*P.S.*—Since I concluded my letter, my affairs have taken a new and distressing turn. The happiness which seemed to be so nearly within my grasp, appears now to be retreating, perhaps into an endless future. I learn now, that, according to the terms of the will, Mademoiselle Rogdanovics cannot, until the age of twenty-four, marry any man whose fortune is less than her own, or who cannot prove himself the possessor of an estate bearing a certain value. As I could not do this, even if you were to pay me out my share of Wowasulka (which I should have to call upon you to do at once), I fear that my hopes must be resigned; a girl cannot be expected to wait on indefinitely during years, for an unfortunate man, born under an evil star.

"I can see but one possibility which might save me, and were it not for your often-expressed aversion to

farming life, I should be reluctant even to mention this loophole.

"Possessing an estate is but a matter of form; and if I could prove myself the sole proprietor of Wowasulka —upon paper only, of course—there could be no opposition to the marriage. Marcin is quite ready to abandon me his share upon reasonable terms. Of course I have no right to ask you to do the same; but some of your late anathemas against agriculture have led me to think that such an arrangement might suit both parties.

"Do not answer in a hurry; I wish you to consider the matter coolly, for, after all, it is you who are the head of the family, and have the best right to the estate. Pray consider that to hold out any hope which you could not fulfil would be cruelty. It will be kinder to let me know my disappointment at once. If you remember the last talk we had together, you will be able better to understand my anxiety. I shall count the days till your reply comes: it will be heaven or hell to me."

The P.S. had a P.P.S., which was apparently an after after-thought.

"In case, by any chance, you should consider my proposition, I had better mention that your share of the property, roughly speaking, would amount to about ten or eleven thousand florins. Once again,

U. OF ILL. LIB.

I do not wish to hurry you, but the matter is very pressing. Your signature is but a matter of form, after all."

"Well, what do you say to that?" cried Kazimir, with all the triumphant delight of a player who has discovered a hidden trump in his hand. "Just when I was wondering how I was to get rid of the whole business: is it not a wonderful coincidence?"

"A wonderful coincidence," assented the Auditor, with emphasis. "I agree with you."

"Then why do you stare down into your glass, instead of expressing your opinion?" asked Kazimir, who was himself a little staggered at the marvellous manner in which the second half of the letter answered the question suggested by the first.

"Because I don't know your brother; he is not in the regiment, you see."

"But he *is* my brother, and that is enough."

Again Kazimir felt a little sore, he did not exactly know why.

"Yes, he *is* your brother. Is he like you? impulsive, hot-headed, scatter-brained, and all the rest of it?"

"N—no, not very; all Poles are a little scatter-brained, are they not?" But just at this moment Kazimir remembered Lucyan's words—"I am a Greek

and you are a Pole, that is the difference between us;" however, he kept this to himself.

"Seems to be very desperately in love, eh?" and the Auditor's fat forefinger tapped the sheet.

"Well, I suppose so," said Kazimir, folding the letter into his pocket-book. Certainly there were expressions in Lucyan's letter warmer than any he had ever expected to hear from his brother; but then it could probably be explained by considering that "still waters run deep," combined with the reflection that all is not gold that glitters; for Kazimir was just sleepy enough to mix his metaphors upon Marcin's principle, and yet he was enough wide awake to be conscious of a disagreeable start when he found that he had been putting away Lucyan's letter close alongside of the crystal flower which Xenia had given him. The contact seemed like profanation, and, with a sort of fearful haste, he parted them.

"Lady very beautiful?" inquired the Auditor, holding up the bottle to the light, to see how many glassfuls were still to be squeezed out.

"She is nice-looking," said Kazimir, shortly.

The Auditor having known Kazimir for ten years, understood from this moderation that the lady was plain.

"Your brother is *not* like you, then?"

"I never said he was not; he is not a soldier, of course, which makes a difference."

"Any profession?"

"He studied the law."

"Aha!" the Auditor almost choked over a gulp of wine; "wonderful thing for sharpening the wits." He winked at the ceiling, and lolled back again. His breath was thick. Nodding his flushed face, he reeled tipsily on the seat; but in the midst of it all, his blinking eye was the eye of a lawyer—of a man shrewd, sharp, suspicious almost, as he always became in face of any real or imaginary peril threatening any member of *the* regiment.

"Ten or eleven thousand florins," he repeated. "The estate would then be valued at about 33,000. Not much for an estate in Poland. That's your idea of it?"

"I have not got any idea," said Kazimir, drowsily; but in truth his impression—an impression too vague to be trusted—had always been that the value was much larger. "I once heard my mother say that something was worth 36,000 florins, but I don't know what it was."

"Queer—scarcely tallies. What is the land like?"

"I don't know anything about it; the only thing that was drilled into my head was, that the Propinacyas were the most valuable part of the estate,

and that almost the entire income is derived from them."

"Aha, Propinacyas! excellent brandy they make sometimes; have often heard of their great value. Is that all you know of the place?"

"Yes, that is all."

Kazimir's fingers rapped the table impatiently; he felt rather chilled from his first heat of exultation. "Of course I shall accept this proposal at once."

"Of course you shall do nothing of the sort. You'll take time to think over it."

"What is there to think over? You see he says it is only a matter of form. I am not going to play dog in the manger, by keeping something for myself which I don't care for, and which would at once secure my brother's happiness. And as for the value of the estate, why, I suppose Lucyan can make a simple sum of division by three as well as anybody else."

"Keep your head cool, that is what I say." The Auditor's voice had reached the hiccoughing stage, but his eye twinkled all the more shrewdly. "I insist upon giving you my advice. I am a minor Providence sent into the world in order to keep the brains of scatter-brains together; that is my vocation. No wonder you youngsters call me 'the Oracle;' it's hard work, and that's why I need to——" he pointed to the empty bottle significantly. "I'll tell you what you'll

do. Don't shrug your shoulders; perhaps you think that because I'm more than half tipsy I don't know what I'm talking of. I tell you my brains are sharper than yours at this moment. You'll write a nice long letter to your brother, and you'll ask him, in the first place, to show you the matter in black and white; and you'll sign no paper before you have seen the lease of those Propinacyas; that will tell us their value, and that will be the touchstone of the business; that will trump it, in fact."

"A nice long letter," echoed Kazimir, ruefully. "I cannot do that."

"Don't look down-hearted; another glass of wine. You don't seem to get on with the *santo;* have some *nostrano* then—good, strong, black stuff."

"No, thank you, I have no taste for ink, either in glasses or upon paper. I cannot write that letter, I tell you."

"You can't? H—m, h—m, h—m. Let me see; it looks rather interesting. You are one of the regiment, and I am the foundation-stone on which the regiment has been built. What should you say if I wrote instead of you, and put the business questions to your brother?"

"What should I say? I should bless you till the end of my days. But," rather apprehensively, "you won't write to-night, will you?"

The Auditor rolled with laughter. "I appreciate the hint: no, I shan't write to-day; not because brain isn't clear enough, but because hand isn't steady enough."

"And to-morrow? The matter is pressing, mind."

"To-morrow I shall be all square again. I declare that bottle is dry already!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

OVERTRUMPED.

. . . . "And a brother noble,
Whose nature is so far from doing harms,
That he suspects none; on whose foolish honesty
My practices ride easy!—I see the business.
Let me, if not by birth, have lands by wit:
All with me's meet, that I can fashion fit."

—*King Lear.*

An army had stormed the fortress and carried havoc into the very heart of the capital, destroying and devouring everything it touched. But the army was neither French, Italian, nor Austrian; and the fortress was built not of brick, nor either of stone.

The fact was, that Lucyan's favourite rose had been ailing for some days. In vain did he water his darling, morning and evening, with his own white hands; in vain did he watch her, as a mother watches her sick child; the beautiful rose drooped more heavily every day, and hung her fair salmon-tinted head ever lower. She moped and sulked, and would not be cheered either by sunbeam or dewdrop; she was blind to the charms of the hovering butterfly, and

deaf to the drowsy hum of the velvet bee that buzzed past. Strong measures were necessary; and Lucyan, who never hesitated to take strong measures, once having recognised their necessity, put on a pair of gardening gloves and examined his favourite, leaf by leaf. The gardening gloves were a wise precaution, for the sick child was irritable, as sick children often are, and took a sort of peevish pleasure in pricking and scratching its attentive nurse.

But the nurse had sharp eyes, and soon came upon the root of the evil. It was this myriad of little green dots, infinitely smaller than a pin's head, that were fretting the beautiful rose to death. Smoke alone could help here; and therefore it came about that on one of the earliest days of July, Lucyan was to be seen smoking a cigarette into the face of a splendid tea-rose. It was with infinite satisfaction that he watched the tiny green dots growing first grey and then black, and finally dropping in shrivelled patches to the ground. There were plenty other roses all around: deep red, tender pink, and dead white; they stood behind him, and to the right of him and the left of him. But just now Lucyan's whole soul seemed wrapped in this one tea-rose. The case was more interesting to him, precisely because more difficult; to triumph over a stubborn enemy would be agreeable in exact proportion to the stubbornness of that enemy.

There are men, the strength of whose intellect allows them to attend to several subjects at a time. Lucyan was one of these; and now, while operating upon the rose, it might have been noticed that his attention was at the same time fixed upon the stretch of road visible, as though he were expecting something to appear there.

Two days ago he had received a letter, and to that letter he had not yet replied. He was not a man to be easily surprised, yet that letter had certainly taken him by surprise. It had thrown him considerably out of his calculations. He had expected to have to do only with Kazimir, and Kazimir he thought he could manage,—and now he had found himself tackled by a lawyer, and—as his first glance told him—an acute lawyer. Lucyan very keenly appreciated the point and weight of the leading questions put to him. He felt an immediate respect, and almost a sort of sympathy, for the man who had put them, even though that man had thrown him out in his calculations. Had he foreseen this contingency, undoubtedly his plans would have been laid on a different system; but as he had not foreseen this contingency, and as he was neither morally nor physically a coward, he must carry out his plans as they had been laid. After the first chill of surprise, his spirit rose to the emergency. The triumph would be all the greater for the strength

of the enemy. There was a sort of keen excitement in the question now; for it was required that he should stake his wits against the wits of another man, and that other man not a fool. Here also, as with the tea-rose, strong measures were necessary. He must substantiate his own statement, and defend the ground on which he had placed himself. No use in reflecting now that it would have been better to have placed himself on other ground. Above all, there must be no hesitation.

It had taken him one day and two nights to mature the plan which now was fixed. A certain instrument was necessary for working out that plan; and as Lucyan stood blowing out puffs of grey smoke, it was for the arrival of that instrument that he was looking towards the road.

The road was all but deserted. One peasant-cart rattled past, laden with green hay; and one peasant-woman trudged past, her bare feet ankle-deep in dust, while her high leather boots dangled over her back. A third object came in view, a black, long, and lean object. This one did not trudge past, but turning off the road, bent his head for a moment, and peeped furtively through the trees; then came on sidling towards the bush on which that tea-rose grew.

"The gracious Pan desires to speak to me?"

Lucyan jerked away the cigarette-stump, and care-

fully drawing off his right glove, took the comb out of his pocket. The comb looked a little haggard and worn, as upon close inspection did Lucyan himself. They had both been severely taxed of late, and in the midst of straining anxieties the one had sought comfort in the other.

"Yes, I shall speak to you presently, when I have done with this rose," said Lucyan.

"Just as the gracious Pan pleases. Aitzig comes as he is desired, and waits as long as he is commanded; even though he may be missing the chance of earning some honest florins, by filling his feather-sack in the poultry-yards of the villages."

"It will be time," observed Lucyan, drawing off his second glove, "to complain of having lost your feathers, when you see what exchange you have made."

"It is a hard life," said the Jew, cautiously; "but it is not for Aitzig to complain."

If he had looked humble before, he looked abject now; but every nerve was on the strain already, and with strung and quivering curiosity he waited for what was to come.

Lucyan bent over the rose-bush, here and there delicately shaking off some of the clinging insects. "We are at the beginning of July now," he remarked.

"The beginning of July! so we are, so we are."

"Next week will be a busy one; I shall have little time for gardening."

"A busy one," repeated the nasal echo, "so it will be—what with the hay, and the sheep-shearing, and the cattle-selling;" at each point he shot a glance of inquiry at Lucyan's face, to see if it had hit the mark, but Lucyan went on quietly with his rose-bush. It was full a minute before he observed, "The lease of the Propinacyas will be up on Tuesday."

"So it will, gracious Pan—so it will," and Aitzig held his breath and waited for more. It was quite certain that he had not been sent for to hear the announcement of a plain fact, which he knew already.

Lucyan snipped off a yellow leaf. "On Tuesday, therefore, the lease will be renewed."

"On Tuesday, yes!" Aitzig breathed a garlic-scented sigh. "Naftali Taubenkübel, fortunate among the children of Israel, will have his lease renewed on Tuesday."

"Wait till his lease *is* renewed, and then call him fortunate."

"It is as good as signed already," said Aitzig, smiling an unsteady smile, in hopes of concealing his inward agitation. "Naftali Taubenkübel has held the lease for thirty-two years. Was his beard not black when first he signed it, and is his beard not white now, and beginning to thin out?"

"Naftali Taubenkübel can be thrown over if I choose," answered Lucyan, slowly; and as he spoke, he picked, with great delicacy, a shining green beetle off the bush and dropped it to the ground. "The lease is not yet signed for the thirty-third time." Lucyan's heel crushed down the emerald beetle into the gravel of the garden-path.

Aitzig struck an attitude of melodramatic surprise.

"The gracious Pan speaks thus! In what has Naftali Taubenkübel been unfortunate enough to displease his noble master?"

"Oh, nothing that I know of," said Lucyan, carelessly, giving a final grind to the wreck of the rose-beetle. "But I am thinking—only thinking, mind—of making the lease change hands."

"And who,"—Aitzig's voice was hoarse with the emotion of suspense,—"who is it that the gracious Pan is thinking of favouring with that grand lease?"

"There, that will do," said Lucyan, with a final touch to the rose-bush, "we shall see how you are to-morrow, *ma belle Madame Graula!*" And with a last lingering and tender glance, he turned from the tea-rose to the Jew.

"Follow me up-stairs, Aitzig,—I have a little matter to discuss with you."

Like a dog at his master's heels, Aitzig followed. He never forgot those three or four minutes that he

walked behind Lucyan. They were to him like the lull before the storm, like the pause before the battle; this, he did not doubt, was the crisis and turning-point of his life. For years and years the lease of the Wowasulka Propinacyas had been his sweetest ideal, and the crown of his ambition. He had yearned for it and intrigued to get it, all in vain. Was it possible that the dream was now to be fulfilled? The thought made him almost giddy. But though giddy, this Jew was too much of a Jew not to see that some motive lay here concealed, and therefore it was that those three minutes seemed to him so very much like the pause before the battle. As he followed Lucyan—who walked along without any appearance of hurry, pausing every now and then to stoop over a flower-bed, or to pluck some unsightly weed from the pathway—Aitzig was inwardly invoking the assistance of all his forefathers, beginning with the patriarch Abraham and ending with his own father, who had dealt in old iron, and who now slept the sleep of the faithful, under an inexpensive gravestone.

When the little square room up-stairs was reached, Lucyan, apparently forgetful of the heat, and indifferent to the scent of garlic, first closed and bolted the window, and then, sitting down, began to toy with his comb.

After Aitzig had been kept on thorns a minute or so, Lucyan half turned his head towards him. "Have you made inquiries about that set of second-hand harness you heard of?"

"I have looked at it again," stammered Aitzig.

"Ah, very well. Remember that a florin-fifty must be beaten off the price."

"Scarcely a florin could I beat off it."

"Fifty more, or I do not take it." Lucyan appeared absorbed in the view from the window, but during that pause he knew just as well as though he had had eyes at the back of his head, that Aitzig was standing with neck craned forward, and sunken eyes glistening, greedily waiting for the next words.

"Was it about the harness that the gracious Pan desired to see me?" he ventured at last.

"No; I have a note down here about the cattle-market too."

"The gracious Pan was mentioning something about the Propinacya!" Lucyan smiled under his moustache, and mentally scored one point. "Yes, to be sure. What was it I said?"

"That the gracious Pan was thinking of making the lease change hands——"

"Ah, yes; and you asked who it was that I was thinking of favouring with the lease; did you not ask that, Aitzig?"

"Yes, Pan." Aitzig's yellow fingers were winding themselves convulsively in and out of the ragged cord at his waist.

"That is a simple question, and easy to answer. Would the answer interest you? Well"—for Aitzig nodded, being too far gone for words—"the man to whom I give the lease must be ready to do any service I require of him."

"I understand," said Aitzig, eagerly.

"He must be ready," continued Lucyan, "to obey blindly any order that might be given him, without venturing to put up his opinion against my own. Do you understand that?"

"Perfectly, Pan—I understand perfectly," said Aitzig, perceiving that there was some dirty work to be done—something that was not quite *Koscha;*[1] and instinctively he began turning up the cuffs of his greasy kaftan, as if to intimate that he was the man to do it.

"What I should require in future I do not know," said Lucyan, examining his nails; "but, at the present moment, there is one immediate condition attached to the lease."

"Gracious Pan!" cried Aitzig, starting forward,

[1] According to the Mosaic law, a thing is either *Koscha* or not *Koscha*—that is, *clean* or *unclean*. Thus the front quarters of an ox are *Koscha*, the hind quarters not *Koscha*.

"you may be sure that poor old Aitzig would fulfil that condition, if you so desired it."

Lucyan saw the weak point in the enemy's armour, and struck at it.

"Who said I was talking of you?" he inquired coolly, as, with a sharp movement, he raised his head. Aitzig shrank back, cowering towards the door. The spot beside the door was the spot naturally assigned to him, so as to leave as wide a space as the size of the room allowed between the Jew and the Christian. It was only in the heat of excited feeling that he ever overstepped his bounds. "We were talking of the lease, were we not? Do you know what rent Naftali Taubenkübel has paid for it during these thirty-two years?"

"Four thousand florins he has paid every year."

"Exactly so; four thousand florins," repeated Lucyan, rapping out with the comb four little taps on the palm of his left hand. "It is not always convenient, however, that the sum should be precisely known."

Aitzig made no answer, for he was still on the watch and on the strain, not quite seeing daylight as yet.

"I believe," said Lucyan, carelessly, "that it is sometimes considered, let us say *agreeable*, to give out the sum of such a lease a little different from what it really is."

"It may be, noble Pan," agreed Aitzig, who thought that he saw a glimmer of light.

"When I say *different*, of course I do not mean higher. I have heard, for instance, of Jews who managed very neatly to escape about half their taxes in that manner. Have *you* heard of such Jews, too, Aitzig?" At the last words Lucyan turned his head so suddenly, and eyed the Jew so sharply, that Aitzig had not time to put on the proper coat of innocence, which would have clothed him most becomingly at this moment. He could only stand and nod in reply, and cautiously admit that he might have heard of such Jews.

"There are other cases," went on Lucyan, "in which it would be convenient to have the rent named at a lower price. Supposing that such a case had arisen, and supposing that there happened to be a Jew who was anxious, very anxious, to have the lease—do you understand me, Aitzig?"

"Yes, yes; wherefore should Aitzig not understand?"

"Well, supposing that Jew was told that the lease for four thousand florins would only be given him if he agrees to draw out a second lease, which affirmed that he paid two thousand, what do you think would be that Jew's course?"

"A false lease!" cried Aitzig, starting backwards

with two raised and outspread hands, pious horror painted on his face.

"A false lease," repeated Lucyan, after him, quite distinctly and slowly, for he never shrank from calling things by their proper names. "Have I not spoken clearly enough? Well, I will speak clearly now. I was thinking of giving the lease of the Propinacyas to you, on condition that you signed that false paper; but as you object to the idea, we need talk no further about it," and Lucyan rose, walked over to the book-case, and drawing out the 'Hints to the Rose Lover,' began to turn over the pages.

"Have I heard the gracious Pan aright?" gasped the dazzled Jew. "He would give the Propinacya to poor old Aitzig? Is Aitzig to be blest with a fortunate old age?"

"On that one condition," remarked Lucyan, across his shoulder. "And, of course, you understand that the paper remains in my hands, not in yours. There will be no room for false play there, Aitzig."

"The God of Moses has been merciful to Aitzig," continued the Jew, lost in a sort of ecstasy.

"Then you accept the condition?"

"The condition!" Aitzig started out of his dream. "The false lease? How could Aitzig Majulik damn his soul by such a deed?" and Aitzig screwed up his eyes, and drew up his shoulders, and threw up his

hands, and looked the picture of outraged virtue. "Everything else will Aitzig do but that one thing."

"And nothing else but that one thing will give you the Propinacya."

"It is too sinful a deed to ask of a child of Abraham."

"Very well, then, you can go now. I have something to see about."

He sat down at the table, and with perfect composure he opened the book he held.

"How could my forefathers rest in peace," whined the factor, lingering, "if I have to do such a deed? Would not my mother turn in her grave?"

"Very likely she would," said Lucyan, quietly. "Have you understood me? Go!"

He heard the door open and close again, and then he heard Aitzig go three steps down the passage. He smiled to himself, and went on with his book. His hand did not even shake as he turned the pages of 'Hints to the Rose Lover' (laying it open finally at the chapter on *Rose Diseases*), for his nerves were as firm as steel.

The step on which he had resolved, and which he was now engaged in taking, might, at first sight, appear imprudent and even perilous, but in reality it was the result of cold-blooded calculation. Having minutely weighed the proportions of risk against those of gain, he had concluded that this apparently perilous

thing was, in reality, the safest thing which he could do, granted that a certain object was to be gained. It was a bold leap which he had to take, and originally he had not intended to take it; but, in face of the Auditor's letter, he saw no other course. Delay alone would be suspicious; so delay there must be none. The leap was not so wide as it looked; for it was not only that the act he meditated was a simple and almost an easy thing in such a country as Poland, and such a time as that; but it was also that Lucyan knew his own strength, and every inch of the ground as well. He knew his brother, he knew Aitzig Majulik, he knew even the Auditor, although he had never seen him. He respected him for his shrewd questionings; but, at the same time, he had caught sight of the limits of that shrewdness. With an eagle eye he had espied the advantages of his own position, and the disadvantages of the enemy; for instance, the disadvantage of distance, of ignorance, of honesty, and belief in honesty.

Of his instrument he was quite certain. He had not felt the slightest uneasiness when Aitzig left the room in that burst of outraged virtue, nor would he have felt uneasy if Aitzig had left the house, nor even if he had stayed away from the house a whole day long. He knew that his hold upon the Jew was just as firm as though one end of an iron chain had been

around Aitzig's neck, while the other end was in his own hand. The only question which caused him the slightest anxiety was as to how long the Jew would take before coming to terms. He wished, for many reasons, that the whole business should be hurried through. For one reason, he could not marry before this was settled, and he had resolved to marry next month. Besides, there were rumours of an armistice between the fighting armies; and though it would probably not last long, yet an armistice would not just at present have been convenient for Lucyan. In the meantime, however, he was not sure whether Aitzig had left the house, or even the passage. His estimate of the Jew was not at fault; for presently the door glided open softly, very softly, and a lean figure squeezed itself in. Lucyan, without raising his head, turned over another page.

"I have but returned to ask a little question of the gracious Pan."

"Did I not tell you to go?" said Lucyan, sternly.

"It is but a question I have to ask," stuttered the Jew. "If such a man could be found who would consent to damn his soul in order to satisfy the gracious Pan, what would the gracious Pan be pleased to give him?"

"I have told you what; the Propinacya."

"*Gott und die Welt!* but Naftali Taubenkübel

has held the Propinacya for thirty-two years, and no one has asked of him that he should damn his soul. Naftali Taubenkübel will be gathered to rest with his forefathers, while poor Aitzig Majulik——"

"As Aitzig Majulik has not accepted the condition, no doubt Aitzig Majulik will be gathered to his forefathers too."

"True, Pan—most true." Aitzig smiled a sickly smile, as if the notion of being gathered to his forefathers had suddenly lost its charm. "But what Jew will the noble Pan find more ready to serve him than Aitzig?"

"Well, Aitzig," said Lucyan, carelessly, "I should not mind taking fifty florins off the rent of the first year."

Aitzig swiftly crossed the room on tiptoe, and whispered into Lucyan's ear, "Five hundred."

"Get away, you dog! Fifty, or this business is not clenched."

"I could not do this thing for fifty florins, and I could not do it for a hundred florins; a heavy sin it is," and Aitzig gave a sigh in proportion to the heaviness of the sin. "Consider that, gracious Pan; if the gracious Pan had said four hundred and eighty, or"—as Lucyan angrily raised his head—"four hundred and fifty."

"I will give you sixty, but not a penny more."

"Four hundred and twenty," whined the factor.

"Sixty, or you get out of the room this instant."

"Gracious Pan,"—and Aitzig in the extreme of his anguish wound his hand through his beard,—"let us say four hundred and ten."

"There is the door," remarked Lucyan.

"Four hundred, gracious gentleman."

"Seventy-five, or get away."

"Three hundred and fifty," shrieked the Jew, for Lucyan had risen from his chair.

"You don't see the door? I will show you the way. There!" with a vigorous gesture, neatly executed and very effective, he pushed the Jew into the passage and shut the door upon him, although Aitzig, through the narrowing chink, found time to gasp back, "Three hundred!"

Having done this, he returned to the table, where the 'Hints to the Rose Lover' still lay open at the chapter on *Rose Diseases*. But this time his calmness was not real; his lips were compressed, and his finely cut nostrils dilated and contracted quickly, as he passed his handkerchief across his forehead. The day was warm and the room was close, and his last act had been a rather exhausting one. His eyes indeed were on the book, but his whole attention was taken up with listening; in short, feverish strokes, he passed the comb through his black hair till it crackled like

burning straw, and shot sparks, as though it wished to join in the excitement of the business.

There was a sound at the door, just as if a large dog were scratching with hard claws, and rubbing its soft body against it. There was breathing too, hard by the keyhole, which might have passed for canine breathing. Lucyan raised his head and listened, taking care not to make the smallest noise; the hand which held the comb was poised in the air motionless, and his eye was fixed in the strain of attention.

"Two hundred and sixty," whispered Aitzig through the keyhole.

Lucyan moved not a muscle, but maintained his fixed attitude.

There was not thirty seconds' pause before the whisper hissed through the keyhole, "Two hundred and fifty florins."

Lucyan remained just as he was, and there followed a longer pause this time. Perhaps the dead silence had chilled the heart of the Hebrew, for the next whisper showed a considerable leap downwards: "Gracious Pan, a hundred and eighty."

Quite noiselessly Lucyan rose and approached the door, but paused for another moment there, bending his ear to the keyhole.

"A hundred and fifty."

Lucyan opened the door so suddenly that the

Jew stumbled forwards. "What is that you said?" and seizing Aitzig by the collar, he dragged him head foremost into the room.

"A hundred and fifty," whimpered the breathless Hebrew.

"Bah! I should have touched you with tongs," said Lucyan, with an air of most delicate disgust, wiping his white fingers upon his cambric handkerchief.

"The noble Pan says fine things," said Aitzig, chuckling as though he had been flattered by the choicest of compliments. "A hundred and fifty will be given to poor old Aitzig Majulik then?"

"In the name of peace, I will give you a hundred, and that is my last word. Is this bargain clenched?"

Aitzig wavered, and began to shuffle and cough, while Lucyan threw himself back into his comfortable arm-chair. He had been playing his victim like a trout for the last ten minutes, and now the trout was trembling on the line, while he drew him slowly, slowly towards the shore.

"It is clenched then. I give you the Propinacya and a hundred, and you give me the second lease—the *false* lease. Is that clear?"

Somehow, at the eleventh hour the Jew took fright at the plain word. He stood there before his tormentor, trembling, uncertain, dazzled, and alarmed, gabbling out his scruples in a hoarse and halting

voice. There was the risk, after all, which might prove serious; there would be his own writing to hold up against him, there might be detection and prison, he might get into difficulties with the authorities, and he might also get into difficulties with his salvation.

Lucyan, his head thrown back and his eyes half closed, sat and watched with a sort of contemptuous pity the struggle which he had provoked; for he was a great man of his kind, and the other man but a small man of the same kind. The man who had no fear and no conscience looked on at the agony of the man who was a coward, and who had still a grain of conscience remaining.

After a minute or so the spectacle grew tiresome, and even Lucyan's supreme patience gave way. "Don't do it then," he said, bringing his hand down flat on the table. "Don't injure your conscience; and do you know what the result will be? My brother Kazimir will then keep the upper hand in the estate, and my brother Kazimir is far too good and kind a man to turn out such a faithful servant as Naftali Taubenkübel. On Tuesday, therefore, Naftali Taubenkübel can renew his lease."

"Gracious Pan!" said the tortured Jew, desperately, "why is it that you desire this thing to be done?"

"Have I not told you that blind obedience is the first necessity? Why should you try to see, then,

since I choose that you should be blind? Enough that it is my interest to lower the value of the Propinacya upon paper, and enough that it is your interest to hold the Propinacya. Have you understood?"

"Yes, yes, no doubt." Aitzig was writhing in helpless indecision; his deeply sunken eyes, which seemed always to be lying in a sort of dark ambush, were fixed watchfully on Lucyan's face. But he might as well have tried to read through a white stone mask. His low and vulgar cunning was no match for this splendid intellect, trained by high education, and invulnerable at every point.

"A hundred, then," said Lucyan, and he put his hand in the open drawer—"you can have fifty now if you like, and fifty can be taken off the lease." He slowly folded out the crisp bank-note. "A hundred, Aitzig?" repeated Lucyan.

"The gracious Pan will not betray poor old Aitzig?" quavered the Jew, showing the whites of his eyes, and licking his withered lips as a wild beast does at the sight of raw meat. Lucyan, holding the bank-note well in sight of the factor, whose fingers were convulsively closing and unclosing themselves, thought that he had never seen a more hideous sight than the face of Aitzig at that moment.

"Fool!" he exclaimed, with a sort of scornful

frankness. "Do you not see that what I can do to you, you can do to me? You are in my hands, and I am in yours. A hundred, then?"

"My salvation——"

"And twenty, well, since I have no time to bargain."

By the light in those vulture eyes Lucyan saw that the last spark of conscience was extinguished, and the hard bargain clenched at last.

In two minutes more he was alone. Going to the table he poured some violet scent on to his handkerchief to refresh himself, for he was a little tried. "It would not have done without those fifty florins," he reflected; "nothing like the crackle of paper for a Jew." But he sighed regretfully all the same, for he loved his money as much as he loved his flowers. "Fresh air at last!" and he threw open the window to the evening breeze. "Any one coming in would fancy that I had been dining off garlics in my room."

Lucyan leant out of the window and smiled down confidentially at his sick tea-rose.

It almost seemed to him that his darling was raising her drooping head already, and smiling a faintly convalescent smile into the face of the setting sun.

CHAPTER XIX.

A "BUMPER."

"Es ist unendlich schöner, sich zehnmal lieber betrügen zu lassen, als einmal den Glauben an die Menschheit verlieren."—ZSCHOKKE.

VERONA was taking her afternoon *siesta*. So white was the glare brooding over the town, that the houses seemed absolutely to have grown pale, as though exhausted by the heat. Every curtain was lowered, and every shutter barred; not from fear of the siege, which the Austrians half expected, but as a rampart against another enemy, the fierce sun, who beat his fiery blade against every plank, and shot his fiery arrows between each narrow chink and through every unguarded hole.

Every one who had a bed was asleep upon it; and everybody who had none, was asleep in a corridor or on a door-step. The Italians slept on principle, the Austrians slept from sheer fatigue. It would have been hard work to collect a hundred wide-awake people

this afternoon. Two out of the hundred were to be found together in a spacious, marble-paved, large-windowed, and colonnaded apartment, much adorned with faded gilding, and heavily scented with bunches of flowers. Tattered damask curtains of a pale-yellow colour hung over the windows; while the door stood open to the passage, showing a glimpse of stone-paved courtyard, with the vivid red of pomegranate-blossoms clustering here and there between glistening green.

Beside the centre window stood an old-fashioned, many-legged and many-drawered writing-table. There were papers spread on the writing-table, and there were also a bottle of red wine, recently uncorked, and a couple of glasses.

The Auditor, in shirt-sleeves, his cuffs turned up, his collar turned down, and a wet towel tied round his head, sat at this table, alternately sipping wine and fanning himself with a cabbage-leaf.

"Keep your head cool," he remarked, in answer to the last words that had been said. "I know that you are not asking for my advice, and that is just why I insist upon giving it to you. I maintain, as a first step, that your head must be kept cool; there's a second towel, why don't you put it on?"

"Because I am too vain and not hot enough," replied Kazimir, who stood at a little distance, leaning over the back of a damask chair, with his *attila* half

unbuttoned and his hair all pushed back from his forehead. " I do wish you would get into your coat; there is one of those girls coming again, not bringing me more flowers, I hope."

" You dare to talk to me of putting on anything? Be thankful that I have not taken off more. When you are as fat as I am, you will have given over stickling at a *nuance* of propriety."

There were no more flowers coming, fortunately, there being now not a vacant vase in the room; but there was a radiant smile, and a shower of glances, and an insinuating question, as to whether the *Signor tenente* did not wish for more *aqua fresca?* There had been many such smiles and glances during the last forty-eight hours, ever since the handsome hussar had taken up his quarters here; and considering the frequency of these occurrences (for there were two pairs of dark eyes and two sets of radiant smiles in the house) Kazimir bore this one with exemplary patience. Fresh water? Yes, he should be infinitely obliged if the Signorina would bring him some water, only he was so sorry that she should have the trouble. " And another bottle like this one since you're about it," put in the Auditor, whose startlingly grotesque figure, Kazimir was vainly attempting to shield—— " uncorked, *carina mia*, you understand? Dear me, what a temper!" for the radiant smile had quickly changed

to an angry frown, as the Signorina flounced through the door. It was rather hard, certainly, to be chucked under the chin by a fat man of fifty-six, when there was a remarkably well-proportioned man of twenty-six standing by. The Signorina was so put out that she ran the caraffe against the door-post and cracked it. It was almost as unpardonable of the middle-aged man to have chucked her under the chin, as it was of the young man not to have done it.

"There is another head that needs to be kept cool," remarked the Auditor, rolling up his right shirt-sleeve to the elbow; "but to return to yours, she will be back again in a minute, you know, or her sister will—why must you sign this paper here to-day? What is the need of a hurry?"

"What is the need of a delay? My brother wants to marry at once, and he cannot marry until this paper is signed."

"Sign it when the war is over."

"Yes, and keep Lucyan waiting till October, perhaps till November."

"It might be worth while," suggested the Auditor, "to wait and hear the result of the Emperors' talk; they must nearly have had it out by this time. Not that I build much upon it myself, but it is my principle never to lose a chance."

"My principles are the same; and that is just why

I do not want to lose this chance of sending off the papers. You know as well as I do, that the Emperors' conference is nothing but a sham, and that we are not half-way through the war yet. Suppose we are besieged here, what then? Am I to trust to air-balloons or subterraneous passages? No, no, I mean to have my own way. The orderly will be here in a quarter of an hour for the regimental despatches, and my papers shall go with them." Kazimir having announced this determination, shook back his hair and took a turn down the long apartment.

The Auditor rolled up his left sleeve to match the right one. " I think you are the most obstinate man I have ever had in the regiment; when you fold your arms and set your teeth there is nothing to be done with you. Let me see—how sleepy this air makes one feel!" The Auditor yawned, and blinked his eyes drowsily, swallowing half a glass of wine by way of arousing himself. " The papers seem all right; I cannot pick any hole in them, I am afraid;—the lease of the Propinacyas, signed by the name of Aitzig Majulik, and attested by two witnesses. This Jew affirms that he pays a lease of two thousand florins."

" Well?" said Kazimir, impatiently, for the Auditor's head was beginning to nod over the papers.

" Not much of a Propinacya—no, not much; seven, eight, even ten thousand florins is often paid for a

Propinacya in Poland. Are you sure that it is the principal point of the estate?"

"Oh yes, quite sure. I have answered that question a dozen times. What is the use of all this discussion? The case is as clear as daylight. If the Propinacyas are worth two thousand florins a-year, the whole estate cannot be worth more than barely thirty-two thousand, and my share would then be ten or eleven thousand. Lucyan is stretching a point when he offers me twelve, as he now does."

"Keep your head cool and your feet too," said the Auditor, kicking off a boot. "I want you to do what you are doing, with your eyes open."

"My eyes are perfectly wide open already; Lucyan himself opened them. Did I not tell you that he has pressed me repeatedly to take the estate into my own hands? What better proof could you have of disinterested motive?"

"True, true," said the Auditor, sleepily, from behind his wine-glass; his tipsiness was of the mild and drowsy sort to-day. "True enough, but still——"

"No 'but's,' and no 'still's,'" retorted Kazimir; "I do not want to waste another moment over it. Where is the paper?"

The paper was there on the table, spread out flat before the Auditor, and fluttering a little in the draught. A paper most carefully drawn out, in which

it was set forth that the undersigned gave up all his claims upon the estate of Wowasulka to his brother Lucyan Bielinski for the sum of twelve thousand florins. All trouble had been spared Kazimir; there was nothing to do but to write his name at the foot, and the deed would be complete.

"Take it coolly," said the Auditor, and he kicked off his second boot with so much vigour, that it fell at the feet of a man who was at that moment entering.

"Pretty well aimed," said the lieutenant, who lounged in with his hands in his pockets, and a pomegranate-blossom between his teeth, looking serene and provokingly cool. "Here's a fine sight for a warm summer's day. Bielinski and the Oracle fighting!"

"Why did you not let me do it before?" said Kazimir, under his breath. "We shall have no peace now."

"You could not have done it before, foolish boy. Do you imagine that you can sign away an estate, without witnesses to attest your writing?"

"Is he going to sign away an estate?" asked the new-comer serenely. "Happy man! I wish I had an estate to sign away."

"Well, then, Lohonzy is a witness; let us get it over; give me the pen."

"Softly, softly, there is no hurry; one witness is not enough—we must have a second."

"Let us have a second, then!" cried Kazimir, with a stamp of impatience. "Are you sure two are enough? Would it not be better to have five or six? There, Lohonzy, like a good fellow, go and fetch me somebody, anybody—quick!" and the astonished lieutenant was pushed out of the door in search of witnesses.

Presently he returned, looking just as cool as ever, with his hands still in his pockets, and the pomegranate-blossom still between his teeth; accompanied this time by a sheepish youth, very evidently fresh from the pillow, and a bald-headed captain with a cheerful grin and a lilac cotton handkerchief, which, with fearful energy, he passed and repassed across his perspiring brow.

"There!" exclaimed Lohonzy, throwing himself full length on a damask sofa. "I have done my duty nobly; I have brought you a selection of witnesses, old and young, dark and fair, with hair and without hair—take your choice. As a first step towards the proceedings, I propose that we throw all the flowers out of the windows"—and Lohonzy clutched at the nearest vase, and began aiming rose and carnation heads at the chinks between the venetian blinds. "Bielinski is a nuisance wherever he goes; women

always strew flowers in his path, and the consequence is, that his rooms smell like hothouses. You have no objection, I suppose?"

"None whatever," said Kazimir, "only don't chatter about it; let us get this business over."

"I am entirely at your service," said the bald captain, with much unnecessary fervour; while the sheepish youth stood and looked at his hands disconsolately.

"He is going to sign away an estate," explained Lohonzy, flinging a bunch of geraniums against the blind. "It is a very serious matter, I assure you. They were fighting about it when I came in; throwing their boots at each other's heads. What had the Oracle been doing, Bielinski? Preaching too hard?"

"Never mind," said Kazimir, biting his lip.

"Supposing we proceed to business," suggested the sleepy Auditor, gazing down at his feet, as if he very much regretted having no more boots to kick off. "Supposing we proceed to business,—if it is really to be done."

"Of course it is to be done, and at once too. There is the orderly already," for a clatter of hoofs in the stone-paved courtyard broke the silence outside.

"Not quite so fast," and the Auditor staggered to his feet; "I insist upon your considering your position once more."

"And I decline to consider it," said Kazimir, laughing, as he sat down before the table and dipped the pen in ink.

"Listen to me first"—the Auditor took the pen from Kazimir's hand. Here the sheepish youth, who was still young enough to possess a conscience, found courage to ask what it was all about.

"He is going, Esau-like, to get rid of his birthright," explained Lohonzy, flippantly.

"Silence!" said the Auditor, who, with the pen still in his hand, made his way towards a deep arm-chair, and sank heavily into it.

"He has got hold of another pen!" cried Lohonzy, who considered the whole thing—as indeed he considered most things—in the light of a capital joke. Springing from his sofa, and falling upon Kazimir, he succeeded, with the help of the bald-headed captain, in disarming him.

"Enough of this nonsense," said Kazimir, beginning to lose his temper; "I don't see why this affair should be turned into a game of romps. Let me go, Lohonzy; give me that pen directly."

Lohonzy, in reply, cheerfully threw the pen out of the window after the roses and carnations, and then went and sat down on his sofa again. At the same moment the orderly presented himself in the doorway.

"Wait," said Kazimir, controlling himself with difficulty; for he was helpless without a pen, and the only pen in the room was in the Auditor's hand. The orderly retired to the passage.

"You want the pen? Very well, you shall have it; but not till you have listened to me." The Auditor, having tied a fresh towel round his head, and turned up his shirt-sleeves a little higher, made a last and tremendous effort at collecting his wits. All the eyes in the room were unconsciously turned towards him; there was a hush of expectancy. Kazimir, leaning back with his arms folded, tapped the ground impatiently with his heel, and fiercely bit his moustache.

"You shall have the pen, if you want; but it is my duty to make you consider once more exactly what you are doing. It is an abnormal proceeding. Mind that it should not turn out to be what at cards we call a 'bumper,'—the winner scores every point, the loser scores nothing; mind, I say, that you be not the loser. Tear up that paper, and you are perfectly free,—as free as I am, as free as that youngster is,—bound by nothing. Write your name at the bottom of it, and you put yourself entirely in another man's power."

"He is my brother," said Kazimir, simply.

"Cain was Abel's brother," remarked the Auditor. "No, I have not done," as Kazimir raised his head.

"Brother is a very fine word; but we have no brothers in the law. It is an affair of man to man; you resign your rights to a man who may or may not take advantage of your complete dependence. For remember, above all, that no future act of yours can cancel this one. However much you may wish it, however much you may regret it, nothing which you can do in years to come can undo this of to-day. Take five more minutes to consider it; I would not have a harm come to you——" the Auditor's voice grew thick, and his twinkling eyes grew moist. "I would cut off my right hand rather than that harm should come to you; and there is not one of your comrades who would not do the same;" breaking off with a suspicious huskiness, the Auditor gulped down a mouthful of wine. The youngest lieutenant gave a gasp of emotion; the bald captain, waving his handkerchief, seemed anxious to explain that he would not only have his right hand cut off, if necessary, but his left hand as well, and both his feet into the bargain. Lohonzy himself, though he still chewed his pomegranate-stalk, looked considerably sobered. "I do not know your brother," resumed the Auditor; "I know that, in such a case, I could trust my brother as I trust myself: it is for you to decide whether you can trust your brother as you trust yourself. If yes, sign that paper; if not, tear it up."

There was a dead pause in the room,—no sound to be heard but the faint jingle of spurs, as the orderly slowly paced the passage outside.

"Give me the pen," said Kazimir.

"Bielinski, are you considering? I have no right to prevent you, if you insist; but I have a right to warn you that what you are doing is being done in the dark. For the last time: you know your brother, and I do not. If you have one shade of doubt, one atom of distrust, do not sign that paper."

All the eyes in the room had turned from the Auditor to Kazimir. Kazimir's face was not entirely calm. In spite of himself, he was impressed by the warmth of eloquence in the old man's words; in spite of himself, he was touched by the goodwill of his comrades. He was struggling to hide this feeling. He raised his eyes, till now obstinately fixed on the table, and they fell straight on the grotesque figure of the Auditor. In the heat of his speech, the orator had raised himself on his chair; his great red hands grasped the arms with drunken unsteadiness; his head rolled from side to side in the effort of righting itself, while from the wet towel there dripped down unsightly streams, disfiguring the surface of the rich yellow damask. But for the intense earnestness of expression, the figure would have been a repulsive one to behold. The sight of the orator went far towards chilling the effect

of the oration. Was this eloquence perhaps, after all, but drunken rhapsody?

"Give me the pen," he repeated.

The pen was handed to him, in silence this time, and Kazimir dipped it in ink. Somehow, at this fifty-ninth minute of the eleventh hour, the distinct realisation of what he was about to do started up before his mind, sharp and clear. He raised his eyes for one second more, and met four other pairs fixed on him, and saw that the four men were watching him in a sort of impressed silence. The Auditor, with his hands still grasping the arms; the captain, with his lilac handkerchief poised in the air; the young lieutenant, with his mouth hanging open; even Lohonzy, having dropped his pomegranate flower, and sitting with his hands out of his pockets, and a look of curiosity on his face. In that second—for it was but a second—it flashed across him that the slightest show of hesitation at this moment would be an acknowledgment of that shade of doubt, that atom of distrust, of which the Auditor had spoken. And, of course, he had no doubt, no distrust, of his brother Lucyan. The very thought sent the blood to his temples in a rush of indignation. To the four men watching, there was no perceptible pause between the moment when he took the pen, and the moment when, in a quick firm hand, he wrote his name, "Kazimir

Bielinski." A constrained silence had fallen on them all. The signature was attested, and the papers put up and despatched, without a word being said; and the orderly was scarcely well clear of the house, the footfall of his horse still clattering over the stone-paved courtyard, when the Auditor, worn out by the effort of his speech, and overpowered by the reaction, fell into a stentorious sleep. Kazimir, as he watched him rolling in his chair, mentally congratulated himself on not having listened to the scruples of a drunken old man.

He drew a deep breath, and threw himself back in his chair. The captain pocketed his handkerchief and looked at the young lieutenant, who immediately resumed the contemplation of his hands. Lohonzy rose from his sofa, picked up his pomegranate, and, yawningly, stretched his arms above his head. The Auditor snored on peacefully. Several minutes had passed, and no one had materially changed his position, when a fresh clatter broke over the pavement below. "The orderly coming back," was the first thought which suggested itself to the listeners; but the orderly, at any rate, was not coming back alone. The dead courtyard had suddenly grown alive. Voices rang out, questions, answers; there were figures appearing at every door, and heads at every window. If a magician had struck the pavement with his rod,

he could not more rapidly have conjured up a chattering, laughing, and shrieking mob from out of the sleepy stones.

No; this could not be the orderly returning. Here must lie some graver cause,—a sudden attack? an alarm of the enemy? treachery? bloodshed? The listeners had scarcely time to ask themselves these questions, and the Auditor had scarcely time to break off his snoring and rub his eyes, before a heated, dishevelled, dusty, and excited man rushed into the room, and shook everybody present frantically by the hand, shouting all the time at the top of his voice, "Peace! PEACE! PEACE!"

Peace at first sight appeared to be wonderfully unpeaceful. The room was full in a moment, noisy and resounding, every trace of its quiet gone. The streets were alive, the whole town was alive, and the bells were most disagreeably alive—clanging with penetrating tongues.

"Peace!" repeated the Auditor, suddenly and violently grown sober.

"Peace!" echoed the bald captain, at once producing his lilac handkerchief, and turning it into a festive flag.

"Peace!" re-echoed the sheepish youth, hanging his jaw so low, that dislocation appeared imminent.

Everybody was embracing everybody else indis-

criminately. There was not a vestige of calmness remaining anywhere. Every Italian shed tears and beat his breast in the ecstasy of his delight, and every Austrian wrung the hands stretched towards him with a muscular energy which quite made up for the absence of tears. The signorinas of the house were particularly eager to hold out the hand of friendship to their handsome hussar lodger, and with much volubility to express their delight that they need no longer be enemies. If such had been their enmity, a man might think, looking at the overloaded flower-vases, heaven preserve us from their friendship! Is it possible? Can it be true? Peace? peace? peace? Dozens of voices repeated the mighty word with a sort of incredulous interrogation. The news was so sudden as to be almost stupefying.

No declaration of war had ever been so completely startling and unlooked-for as was this announcement of peace. But the next quarter of an hour left no possibility for doubt. At every street-corner the telegram was being read, describing the five hours' interview, at the end of which two imperial hands had met, and the victorious emperor had said to the vanquished emperor, "*Embrassons nous, mon frère!*" It was all as clear and as neat as possible. Austria was to lose most that she held in Italy, and be saved the trouble of repairing her defeats. Even at imperial

card-tables, it seems, are there "bumpers" to be scored, and even crowned brothers can sometimes settle their difficulties so that the result should be entirely satisfactory—on one side.

Of all the shocks of surprises which the news dealt out that day, perhaps none was as violent as that dealt to Kazimir. Peace! He was literally dazed at the bare word. Peace meant disappointment to him, and not hope; it meant discouragement, and not joy.

Mechanically he pressed the outstretched hands of the signorinas, in his abstraction never noticing the insinuating glances which seemed to suggest that at such a moment a warmer salute would be quite permissible.

"Peace!" he exclaimed, turning his face ruefully towards his comrades. "Where are my laurels?"

But second thoughts are best after all, and Kazimir had a second thought. With most men this thought would have been, "I need not have been in such a hurry to send off the papers." But to Kazimir, a thing once done was really done; it was not in his nature to torment himself about what was irrevocable. His second thought was different. No one could tell him where his laurels were, but a voice within him was crying, "You can go home to your brother's wedding!" That bright flush on his cheek, that keen

light in his eye, was it brotherly affection which had made them spring up, or was it—what was it that the voice within him cried again?

" Perhaps, after all, she will take me without my laurels."

CHAPTER XX.

WHOSE TURN?

"Thou com'st in such a questionable shape."
—*Hamlet.*

"PERHAPS, after all, she will take me without my laurels." The thought stuck in Kazimir's mind, and rang in his heart from that moment forth. He saw it written on the sky and on the earth, he heard it in the very shriek of the engine which in a few days more was bearing him homewards. Four months of separation and of silent waiting he had undergone, and it was beginning to be borne in upon his mind that the separation and the silence were no longer to be endured. He had made an heroic effort at prudence and common-sense, but he was able to hold himself in check no longer. Could a man marry on twelve thousand florins and his pay, or could he not? That was the question to which the case resolved itself. At any rate, he would insist now upon a distinct and open engagement.

"How surprised they will all be to see me!" laughed Kazimir to himself, as on a fine July afternoon he found himself on the last stage of his journey. No one knew of his arrival; for in such a hurry had he been to get through his final duties and obtain leave of absence, that he had not even taken time to write home and announce himself. The hurry was, strictly speaking, unnecessary, seeing that the date which had been fixed for Lucyan's wedding was still a fortnight off; but much as Kazimir hurried, the hurry seemed to him yet more like lagging than like haste.

The first thing which struck upon his ears as he stepped from the carriage was a sound of vigorous hammering — the second, a great rustling of some crackly stuff. The house bore upon its face an appearance of flurry and bustle. Kazimir scanned all the windows, but there was not a face looking out of any. Had no one been roused by the carriage-wheels? Lucyan's hearing was usually so acute.

He stepped into the passage, and stepped at the same moment straight into an open parcel of small tacks, which his spurs sent flying in all directions. Next he stumbled over a pair of pincers, and, finally, saved himself from falling by catching at a wooden ladder hard by.

The combined noises which these accidents produced brought a figure to the scene. At the open

door to the left there suddenly appeared Mademoiselle Robertine. That door had been the door of Madame Bielinska's room; but now, alas! how desecrated was the sanctuary! As he thought of the difference between now and then, Kazimir felt a pang of bitter regret. Then the room had been gently darkened, and sweet with that faint scent which always hung about his mother; and now the windows stood gaping wide open, letting in the broad glare of daylight, and letting out a rain of hammer-blows. The curtains had then been faded, and soft, and thick; and now, in the midst of noisy confusion, of hammers and nails, and loud-voiced workmen, Kazimir caught sight of yards and yards of rose-sprigged chintz, surging in crackly billows over floor and furniture.

The sight was evidently as painful, though for different reasons, to Mademoiselle Robertine as it was to him; for she came forward quickly, closing the door behind her. A mole that witnesses the digging up by some cruel spade of its own private labyrinth could not have suffered more than did aunt Robertine. Henceforward there would not be a single dark spot remaining in the house, unless she chose to take refuge in the damp depths of the cellar. As she stood confronting Kazimir now, she was blinking her eyes under the glare of daylight, looking very much indeed like a newly-dug-up mole.

"So you have come back?" she remarked, gazing at her nephew with not exactly a gaze of welcome.

"Of course I have come back," said Kazimir, cheerfully. "Did I not take you by surprise? Ha, ha! I thought I should. But tell me, aunt Robertine, what are all these hammers, and nails, and rosebuds about? What are they doing to my mother's room?"

"They are doing a great deal to your poor mother's room," said Robertine, gloomily.

"So I see; but why have they taken down the old curtains?"

"They are putting up fresh ones," said Robertine, with a deeper shade of gloom. "Much too light a pattern," she murmured half to herself; "but young women are always foolish, and she insisted on a white ground."

"Then the room is for the young couple?" said Kazimir, beginning to realise.

"It is not for me to say." Robertine turned backwards, and put her fingers on the handle of the desolated mole-hill.

"Don't go back there, aunt Robertine; I want to hear more, and there is no hurry,"

Robertine gave him a long fixed look, and then slowly and solemnly she pronounced, "There is a great hurry."

"Wait a minute more."

"I cannot. The workmen have been in only two hours. The key of the room was not found till eleven o'clock."

"Well, then, I will go and speak to Lucyan. Where is he? Up-stairs? I think I shall burst into his room and frighten him." Kazimir sprang two steps up the stairs, and then paused at the sound of his aunt's voice.

"You cannot frighten your brother," Robertine was saying.

"I shall try, at any rate," laughed Kazimir, beginning to mount again. Robertine allowed him to get half-way up before she spoke next.

"It is no use going to your brother's room."

"Why not? Is he not in it?"

"I cannot exactly say that he is in it. I have, in fact, every reason to suppose that he is not in it; and what is more, I have reason to suppose that he is not even——" she hesitated.

"Well?" said Kazimir, impatiently, coming a step down.

"Not in the house," finished Robertine, with an effort.

"What a bore! Where is he then? And where is Marcin?"

"Your two brothers are gone together."

"Where to? Out walking? Out farming? To Lodniki?" with an inspiration.

Robertine would not in so many words commit herself by asserting that Lucyan and Marcin were gone to Lodniki, but by her silence she admitted the fact.

"Aunt Robertine, tell me," said Kazimir, descending another step, "is Mademoiselle Xenia at Lodniki as well?"

Robertine, who had turned already, faced round again at the question with visible surprise upon her face, and for once in her life startled into a direct reply, she answered, "Of course she is; where else should she be?"

"Then I shall go over at once!" cried Kazimir, impetuously.

"What will you do there?" inquired the aunt, still surprised.

"I want to see Pani Xenia," said Kazimir, half repenting his rashness in the next moment; but in the next again, he remembered that the secret would, after all, not be a secret for long.

Robertine stood motionless. "What good will it do you to see Pani Xenia to-day?"

"What good? More good than all the rest of the world put together."

"Oh, you think so? And it never strikes you that Pani Xenia may have other visitors to attend to to-day?"

Other visitors! Kazimir's buoyant mood experi-

enced the very slightest touch of a chill at that suggestion of other visitors. A large phantom rose up before him, hovering dimly and threatening indistinctly, and the name of the phantom was *Tiburtio.* Tiburtio was rich, successful, well connected; no—it was not possible; he *could* be but a phantom. Kazimir was not in the least afraid of him; but still he should like to know, just for curiosity's sake, whether or no the phantom happened to be at Lodniki just now. He put the question, and received an answer so ambiguous as to leave the point unsolved.

"At any rate I shall drive over," decided Kazimir. "Does Lucyan drive over every day?"

"Not exactly every day," answered Robertine; "but of course he had to go to-day."

"What for?"

"To make the final arrangements."

There was a mysterious stress upon the word "final."

"The arrangements for what?"

"For that which is to take place."

"The wedding, you mean? But that is only in a fortnight. Is not the date of the wedding fixed, aunt Robertine?"

"The date of the wedding *is* fixed, Kazimir."

"Then why do you talk of final arrangements?"

Robertine turned the door-handle slowly, while her

eyes still remained on her nephew's face. "I repeat what I said before: they are gone over to make the *final* arrangements."

There was nothing more to be got from aunt Robertine; and making his way to his father's room, Kazimir at length obtained a clear answer. In his father's gaze he read the welcome which he had longed for, but not yet found. The approach of the wedding had not touched the solitude of the self-condemned hermit; his consent had not been asked, and his interest was not awakened. He had made no effort even to see the bride.

"Drive over to-day if you will," said Bogumil, smiling at sight of his son's unconscious eagerness; "but it is scarcely worth while, considering that you will have to be over there early to-morrow again."

"Early to-morrow again? What for?"

"For the wedding, Kazio, of course."

"The wedding!" echoed Kazimir, struck with astonishment. "But is not the wedding to be this day fortnight?"

"The wedding is to be to-morrow."

"That is strange. What made Lucyan change his mind?"

Bogumil shrugged his shoulders. "I am sure I never asked. He has suddenly got into a great hurry about it these last two weeks, ever since we got the

telegrams to say that the peace at Villafranca was signed."

But although Kazimir knew now that he would see Xenia next day, his patience was not equal to these twelve hours more. In less than an hour from the moment of his reaching home, he was in the carriage again, and on his way to Lodniki.

That phantom, which aunt Robertine's allusion to "other visitors" had conjured up, hovered along beside the carriage, but Kazimir resolutely declined to consider it. To acknowledge to himself the slightest anxiety on that score, would be to wrong Xenia most unfairly. No, he did not feel anxious, only a little curious. He drew out of his pocket a letter which had reached him some days ago. It was from Marcin, the first letter which Marcin had ever written to him. He read it through again.

"They have told me that you are quite well, and have escaped unwounded; and I want to tell you how sorry I am about it, and that I hope you do not mind it much. Life is too short to notice things usually; but though my eyes are not as sharp as a camel's, I can sometimes see through a deal board. Do you remember teasing me once about pill-boxes and leeches? What I say now is, people should not throw stones at glass houses. I asked aunt Robertine to do it, as I had never done it before, but she wouldn't; and I

can assure you that she did not seem to like it very much, and even shed tears, but she told her that it was no use spilling milk about it. The big young man, by the by, sends you messages, and says that you have not got shot, as you promised in the salt-mine. He is either very glad or very sorry, I can't remember which. It is a pity, I think, on the whole; for when the cat's away, the mice make hay."

There was neither beginning nor end to the letter, which broke off here. Except that it was correctly spelled, there was no reason why it should not have been written by a child of six. Kazimir had laughed over it as a curiosity, without attempting to disentangle the hopeless web of pronouns. Now only, on the back of aunt Robertine's words, did a ray of light seem to fall upon the lines. It was possible, just barely possible, that Tiburtio should in his absence have been harassing Xenia with his unwelcome attentions. Poor child! how she must have longed for his protection! she was so little able to protect herself. Her sweetness and childish confidence might so easily be misunderstood and turned to other account. It was high time that she should be freed from the trials attendant on a secret engagement. Let Xenia fear no more; her protector is approaching fast. In a cloud of dust he flies along. He is choked with dust and

powdered with dust. Dust and rain alternately have combined to make a sort of impromptu whitewash to the bushes which border the forest-road.

Everybody was out in the wood, as he was told on arriving. Not quite every one though; for, looking round him, he perceived Marcin sauntering over the grass. The very first question which he put to Marcin, as soon as the brunt of greeting, the unavoidable embrace, and the customary salute on both cheeks, had been got over, was—

"Is that giant Tiburtio here or not?"

"No," said Marcin, staring hard. "Did you get my letter?"

"Yes, I did."

Marcin still gazed at him rather inquiringly. "Then you don't mind so very much?"

"Oh no; it is all right," laughed Kazimir, "especially if he is not here." Everything seemed to be all right, now that he was so near her. "And the wedding is really to be to-morrow?"

"Yes, it is. Lucyan was in such an awful hurry to have the grass growing under his feet."

"I have come, then, not a day too soon. Which is the way to the wood?"

They walked towards the wood, while the setting sun blazed straight in their eyes. Overhead the stretch of fading blue seemed as though flecked with

crimson foam; the branches of beeches and fir trembled against a blood-red sky.

The brothers walked in silence along the forest-path, which, edged with a mossy rim, and powdered with the bronze of fallen pine-needles, struck straight into the gloom of green shade. Here the tree-roots, heaving up through the rich earth, crawled across the path, bulging and contorting themselves like twisted snakes; and the stripped and capriciously gnawed fir-cones which strewed the ground, spoke of the appetites and sometimes of the whims of the squirrels in the tree-tops.

"It is rather like looking for a drop in a bucket, isn't it?" remarked Marcin, when they had walked some minutes and seen no signs of the others.

"They cannot be far," said Kazimir. "We must find them."

"Ah, there is one of the drops in the bucket; who is it? Lucyan? I shall leave you to him, and go back. It is such fatiguing work to see people getting married."

He had turned, and was sauntering back, while Kazimir alone went forward to meet Lucyan. Lucyan had not noticed him yet. With his hands behind his back, and his eyes on the ground, he was slowly approaching. Kazimir had never before seen his brother's face fixed with this frown of intense thought.

So deep was his abstraction, that Kazimir had got within four paces of him and had not yet been perceived. "I shall give him a start after all," thought Kazimir, with boyish delight, and he walked on tiptoe over the moss. He put his hand down quickly on his brother's shoulder. "Lucyan!" he said in his ear. The shoulder under his hand seemed to give a convulsive twitch at that word. With a shiver and a start, Lucyan raised his head. Kazimir *had* given him a fright, a much greater fright than he at all imagined. With astonishment Kazimir stood witness of it. Never till this moment had he seen Lucyan in want of self-possession—never had it even occurred to him that his youngest brother could turn pale with fright, surprise, or any other emotion. And now Lucyan stood confronting him, pale to the very lips, staring at his brother with a gaze as wild as though Kazimir had been shot at Solferino, and come here straight from his Italian grave. The man who, thinking himself on safe ground, sees a deadly mine sprung under his feet; the seaman who has steered a costly ship through troublous waves, and beholds, within very sight of the port, the leak which must sink him; the player who has played a hazardous game with luck and skill to back him, and who feels his hand arrested as he is about to grasp the prize,—might stare with a gaze as wild as that. But why should a

brother receive his brother with this fixed look of horror?

"What have you come for?" faltered Lucyan, not yet master of himself.

"Why, for your wedding, of course," said Kazimir, half laughing in the attempt to shake off the strange impression of Lucyan's gaze. It was so unusual a thing to see Lucyan disconcerted, that it reacted upon and disconcerted Kazimir himself. "You did not expect me, did you?"

"No, I did not expect you."

"Are you not glad to see me? You have not given me your hand yet."

"To be sure." He put out his hand with a strange and unusual timidity to meet his brother's grasp. That hand struck cold upon Kazimir's palm; it seemed to shrink under the strong pressure.

"And now," said Kazimir, "where are they all? I want to congratulate your bride."

"Where are they?" repeated Lucyan, looking still somewhat scared, though the colour was slowly flowing back to his face. "We need not go there now."

"Oh, but I need to go. Which is the way?"

"This way, then," said Lucyan, hurriedly, and he struck into a side-path, and walked rapidly along it.

"Are you sure this is the way?" asked Kazimir.

"Is it not wonderful, Lucyan, my arrival just on the eve of your wedding?"

"Very wonderful." Lucyan spoke slowly.

"And I never knew anything about the date being changed. It is fortunate that the papers reached you in time. You got them all right, of course?"

"Yes, I got them all right.",

"Everything was clear, was it not?"

"Oh yes, everything was clear." As Lucyan's calmness returned, the habitual sneer began to dawn again in his voice. "You took precious care to make it all clear. What put it into your head to set a lawyer at me?"

"Oh, he offered himself, and I was very glad to be saved the trouble. You know what a bad hand I am at business."

"Well, you are satisfied, I suppose?"

"Oh yes, perfectly; but there are a few points which I don't quite understand."

"What points?" asked Lucyan, quickly.

"The Auditor said I was to put some questions to you. Are you sure we are on the right path? The thing that puzzles me is, that I once heard my mother say that, if she died, our portions would realise thirty-four or thirty-five thousand florins."

"You heard her say that?" Lucyan turned on the path and stood still.

"Yes, I am quite sure I heard that. What could she have meant exactly? Perhaps I am making some great mistake."

Lucyan, having stood motionless for a moment, appeared suddenly to recollect himself, and burst out laughing.

"A great mistake! I should rather think you are making a great mistake, Kazimir. But you heard quite right all the same. Of course our portions amount to thirty-four or thirty-five thousand florins. Our *united* portions do; do you understand? Not each separate one."

"Oh, that is it, then!" said Kazimir, who all the time was scanning the shade of the forest around them. "How stupid of me to make such a huge mistake!"

"Is there anything else which the Auditor told you to ask me?"

"Nothing," laughed Kazimir, "except when I am to get my twelve thousand florins?"

Lucyan gently shrugged his shoulders, and, taking off his hat, he mechanically drew forth the comb. "We shall see about that some day soon. You can hardly expect me to talk business on the eve of my wedding-day."

The plea was so natural, that Kazimir's own conduct struck himself as unfeeling and unbrotherly,

verging on the sordid. Such a thing as money should not even be mentioned on the eve of such a day.

"But where *is* everybody gone to?" he cried. "Lucyan, where have you hidden Pani Vizia?" He was following his brother again along the path: and as the track was so narrow that they could walk but single file, Kazimir could not guess what his brother's face was like. Lucyan was plucking off the leaves in passing; perhaps he had not heard Kazimir's words, for he made no answer to them. He had recovered his calmness now, almost entirely, and he was slowly bracing himself to an effort.

"I hear voices," said Kazimir, standing still. "I am sure I hear voices over there. You are taking me in the wrong direction, Lucyan."

"You are mistaken; they are not there—they cannot be there." In Lucyan's voice there were some symptoms of excitement. "This is the way, I tell you." He walked on a few paces in haste, but Kazimir no longer followed. He stood still listening beside the clump of bushes on the other side. He heard the faint trickling of water and the hum of the gnats in the air, but above it he heard the murmur of voices hard by.

"Wait a moment," said Lucyan, springing to his brother's side.

"I have waited long enough; I am sure they

are there. Don't you hear the voices quite distinctly?"

"Stop! for heaven's sake, Kazimir, stop!" cried Lucyan, seizing his brother by the arm. "I must speak to you first. You seem to think——"

But just then there broke upon Kazimir's ear the ripple of a laugh so clear, so fresh, so light-hearted and free, so much more entrancing than he had ever remembered it. He was not to be held a moment longer; he scarcely heard his brother's words, nor gave one glance to his face. Breaking away from Lucyan, he burst through the tangle of bushes, sprang on to the half-cleared space beyond, and then stood still at sight of the group before him.

There were four people in the group. There was an old gentleman whom Kazimir had never seen before—a grave and important-looking old gentleman, with a double chin, and whiskers as white as his broad and dazzling waistcoat; there was an elderly lady equally strange to Kazimir, dangling a gold-rimmed eye-glass by a string, and gathering up a silk train from the moss; there was Vizia, in a dead-black dress, without one sign of bridal-like ornament about her; and there was Xenia, in slighter mourning, relieved by a bunch of brilliant roses in her belt. On a rustic table alongside there lay more such roses heaped on each other. Upon this group, as they stood together, Kazimir's

sudden appearance through the bushes seemed to have produced a stupefying effect. The old gentleman, tapping his waistcoat, raised his eyebrows to such a preposterous height that they appeared to vanish under his hat-brim; the elderly lady ceased to dangle her eye-glass, and applied it to her eye with an exclamation of shrill astonishment; Vizia turned pale; and Xenia, leaning with one arm against a tree, flushed scarlet up to the temples. Of the four expressions on the four faces this last one was the only one which Kazimir saw; and at sight of the emotion so plainly marked, more marked even than he had looked for, his spirit bounded with delight. He went straight towards her, seeing nobody but her, and took her hand warmly. "I have come back, Pani Xenia," he said.

"My dear," began the elderly lady, in a high cracked voice, turning towards Vizia as she spoke, "who is this—this—man?" The elderly lady would have preferred to employ the word "gentleman," but it grated upon her principles—and she had a great many, and abnormally high principles—to use the word with regard to an individual who appears crashing through a thicket of bushes, and, looking to neither right nor left, walks straight up to a young lady, takes her hand, presses it—*presses* it, I say—and remarks that he has come back. No; such an individual could not be entitled to a higher appellation than *man*.

There was a hurried answer which Kazimir did not catch, but he heard the result it produced.

"Oh, indeed!" said the cracked voice again, partially lowered this time. "So this is the unfortunate young man! Just what I expected, just what I feared." The gold eye-glass was up again, and, with a most penetrating and excruciating keenness, was travelling from the crown of Kazimir's head to the soles of his feet and up again to the crown, hanging upon every button as though to pierce its inward nature.

"How distressing! how very, *very* painful!"

Although the eye-glass failed to produce the full effect intended, yet it did produce some. Kazimir did not know what had been either expected or feared with regard to him, but the scrutiny aroused him to the sense of his certainly strange behaviour. He had made no effort to present himself to this unknown lady, he had not even saluted his brother's bride. With an effort he dropped Xenia's hand, which unconsciously he still held, and turned towards Xenia's cousin.

"Forgive my forgetfulness," he said, earnestly. "I know you understand the reason. I am so glad that I came in time to offer my good wishes to my future sister-in-law." The words all but died on his lips at sight of the stony stare which greeted him. Vizia started back before he had done speaking.

"What is this?" she said, hurriedly. "There is some mistake."

"Another mistake!" echoed Kazimir, half-smiling, and half-vaguely alarmed. "I make nothing but mistakes to-day."

The elderly lady gave a shriek, and quickly stifled it with a lace handkerchief.

"May I ask this gentleman to explain his—hem—peculiar conduct?" demanded the whiskered man, strutting forward, straightening out his white waistcoat, stroking his white whiskers, and swelling with importance, till his double chin became almost triple.

"Am I dreaming or awake?" said Kazimir, rubbing his eyes and shaking himself to make sure.

"More likely dreaming than awake; and, young man," said the old gentleman severely—"young man, I hope you are sober."

"He is drunk; I knew he was," said the elderly lady, getting behind the old gentleman. "He is certainly either drunk or mad."

"If you were both awake *and* sober," resumed the speaker, "you could scarcely have been guilty of this strange mistake."

"Will some one explain it, then?" asked Kazimir, throwing back his head, and eyeing the old gentleman fully as haughtily as the old gentleman eyed him.

"I am right in saying that this lady is my brother's bride."

"Perversity!" shrieked the cracked voice over the old gentleman's shoulder. "Perversity or insanity, which is it?"

"You are wrong, young man. It is that lady who is your brother's bride!"

"That is a lie," said Kazimir, promptly, as the old gentleman motioned towards Xenia.

"Young man, remember where you are!" said the whiskered man, with cutting severity.

"Do not irritate him, pray," said the cracked voice again. "It is not safe. Do you not see how wild he looks?"

Kazimir had turned towards Xenia with a confident question on his lips, but the question was not spoken, for the girl stood now shrinking against the tree-stem, with her hands pressed over her drooping face. Every one around was gazing at him with looks of cold astonishment.

Was this his welcome home?

"It is a lie," repeated Kazimir, a little lower. "Lucyan, why do you not tell them that it is a lie? Where are you, Lucyan?"

Lucyan was there, two paces behind him, having watched the scene in silence. He met his brother's eyes full, but to the appeal he made no answer; and

that set look on Lucyan's face was the first real blow dealt to Kazimir's faith that day.

"Lucyan, explain this on the instant!" said Kazimir, vehemently.

"Hush!" said Lucyan. "In God's name, hold your tongue! wait till we are alone."

"I will not wait a moment," said Kazimir, whose eyes were beginning to flare, and his nostrils to dilate. "I insist upon the answer now, this moment—before all these people, before all the world, if necessary."

"Take her away," said Lucyan aside to Vizia, seeing that Kazimir was no longer to be silenced—"take her away, and your aunt as well, and leave me alone with him."

Vizia was already drawing her cousin towards the path; and the elderly lady, taking care to interpose the old gentleman between herself and the dangerous brother, was quickly following on their steps. There had been no consultation beyond a mutual glance; but by common consent the brothers were left alone.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE TRICK DISPUTED.

"Als ich Abschied nahm, als ich Abschied nahm
War die Welt mir voll so sehr,
Als ich wiederkam, als ich wiederkam
War Alles leer."

—RÜCKERT.

"ONE of us two must be mad," said Kazimir, having stood watching the retreating figures until the tree-stems blocked his view, and he turned back towards his brother. "One of us two must be mad, Lucyan; the question is, which?"

"Why jump to such desperate conclusions?" Lucyan, now that the struggle had come, looked quiet, though still very pale. "We are both perfectly sane; let us try to be calm as well."

"Tell me then, plainly, which of these two girls are you going to marry?"

"You have been told already plainly enough."

"Tell me again," said Kazimir.

"It is Xenia whom I am to marry."

"To-morrow, you say?"

"To-morrow."

"It is Xenia whom you are to marry to-morrow." Kazimir repeated the words once, twice, thrice over, as if striving to bring together two ideas which had hitherto appeared so incongruous, that it had seemed as if they must for ever lie apart. As yet he understood without realising, and saw without believing. "You and Xenia." Something in the words made him shudder in the same way he had shuddered when he had put back Lucyan's letter by mistake alongside of the crystal flower. "You and Xenia. Is this a joke, Lucyan?" he asked, sternly.

"It is not a joke."

"Nor a mistake?"

"It is not a mistake; how should there be a mistake?"

"And she is willing to marry you?"

"My dear Kazimir, this is a strange question on the eve of my wedding-day."

"And she has forgotten me," said Kazimir, incredulously; for a rock cannot be shattered by one blow, nor a strong faith slain by one word. "She has forgotten me so soon, and all her words and mine?"

Lucyan's silence answered, "Yes."

"Then," cried Kazimir, with a fearful burst of passion, as all at once he understood and realised—"then

there has been treachery, Lucyan. I am betrayed, and you have betrayed me. Treachery!" he cried; and blind with the overwhelming pain, he threw himself on his brother, and gripped him rudely by the arm. Had Lucyan at this moment lost his coolness or his temper—had he attempted to resist or retaliate—it might have come to an ugly scene between the brothers. Kazimir, provoked to wildness, would have been capable of any act, however mad. The younger brother's calmness alone checked this; he made no effort even to shake off Kazimir's hand, and he betrayed not the smallest sign of fear.

"If you want to knock me down, Kazimir," he said, quietly, "you can do so very easily; you are twice as strong as I am."

Kazimir's grasp relaxed on the instant.

"It will scarcely do Xenia much good if we fight about her," added Lucyan.

Kazimir flung off his hand and turned away. Lucyan had hit the right chord. Even at this moment of his keenest anguish—even in the depth of the bewilderment which still blinded him—Kazimir revolted at the idea of making Xenia the subject of a vulgar brawl.

"And now," said Lucyan, stroking out the sleeve which Kazimir's grasp had crushed into unsightly

creases—"now, perhaps, you will give me your objections to my marriage. What do you mean by treachery?"

"Your marriage!" The plain words were not to be borne yet. Kazimir turned savagely on his brother. "How dare you say that to me—to *me!* You don't know. O God, this is madness!"

"Be quiet, Kazimir; you are childish. What do you mean by treachery?"

"I mean by treachery," said Kazimir between his teeth, "that you should have pretended an engagement to one cousin, when you were meaning to marry the other."

"Pretended an engagement!" repeated Lucyan, in a tone of utmost surprise. "Explain that, Kazimir. When did I ever pretend?"

"Did you not yourself announce to me your engagement to Vizia Rogdanovics?"

"To Vizia Rogdanovics! Never! You are labouring under some strange delusion."

"Did you not, on the day I left home, as much as acknowledge your intentions?"

"My intentions of marrying some day—yes, undoubtedly."

"Did you not, under my very eyes, pay her the most marked attentions last winter?"

"Kazimir, be calm; I implore of you to be calm.

If you were calm, you would see that I paid no more attentions to Vizia than you did yourself."

"What do you mean?" asked Kazimir, dumfoundered.

"I mean only that, if any one paid attention to Vizia last winter it was you."

"Lucyan, how dare you say that? Have you forgotten the evening of the Krakowiak, and the red rose you gave her?"

"And have *you* forgotten the talk in my room upstairs, and the azalea which you begged from me for her?"

"Oh, but that was before," began Kazimir, a little disconcerted.

"I don't know what it was before," said Lucyan, skilfully pursuing his advantage. "And since we are on the subject of that evening, of course you will have no objection to telling me what passed between you and Vizia on the verandah in the moonlight?"

"Oh, that—that," said Kazimir, eagerly, and then hesitated, as the scene flashed back over his memory He had no right to betray Vizia's words of that evening.

"I thought so," said Lucyan, with a quiet shrug of his shoulders. "Don't be afraid; I am not going to press the point."

"You are entirely mistaken," burst out Kazimir, hotly.

Lucyan raised his hand. "That is not the question. Granted that you had no *serious* intentions towards Vizia, and granted that I may have appeared to have paid her some slight attention, what has that to do with my marriage? Has not a man the right to change his mind? There never could have been any question of my marrying Vizia; on the score of money alone such a thing would have been impossible."

This was not the moment, nor indeed was it likely that Lucyan would ever find any moment convenient to explain to Kazimir the mistake which had been made on that Szabas eve six months ago; how, through the fault of a red shawl, he had mistaken one cousin for the other, and how the supposed poor cousin it was who owned the 70,000 florins; while the supposed rich one had since been left all but destitute by her enterprising father.

"Besides," said Lucyan, with a curious glance at Kazimir, "I am inclined to think that *I* should have had no chance in that quarter."

"You knew that I loved her," said Kazimir, heeding none of these allusions, and he faced straight towards his brother.

Lucyan returned the gaze with a look of unshrinking innocence.

"My dear Kazimir, how could I have made so wild a guess?"

"You knew it," repeated Kazimir.

"Did you ever tell me so?"

"Not in words perhaps; but I thought you saw it."

"If you mean that I noticed a slight flirtation, you are quite right; it was rather difficult, to be sure, to make out which of the two girls it was that you preferred; but I daresay it was Xenia with whom you imagined yourself in love at the time. I do not blame you in the least, mind; a man who is as irresistible to the fair sex as you are, Kazimir, is quite right, if he flits from flower to flower, sipping the——"

"Enough of that, Lucyan; I am in no humour for joking. If you never guessed the truth, why then should you have kept your real engagement secret from me?"

"You do not seem to have got my letters."

"Oh yes, I got letters; but you spoke only of Mademoiselle Rogdanovics; you spoke so purposely. It was a plot," said Kazimir, fiercely.

Lucyan shrugged his shoulders. "I suppose if I talk from now till midnight, I will not get you to understand that either you cannot have taken the trouble to read my letters, or that some of them cannot have reached you. I daresay that I spoke of her sometimes as Mademoiselle Rogdanovics, and some-

times by her name. Is it my fault that posts should go astray?"

Kazimir, for one moment, was silenced. Was he not, after all, wronging Lucyan in this at least? What more natural than that posts should go astray in a time of war? A vision of unreceived, candid, and brotherly letters, certainly did alter the case a little.

"Then you really never guessed?" repeated Kazimir, a little lower.

"Ask yourself whether I could have guessed. Did you so much as hint at the matter on that last day when we talked together?"

Again Kazimir stood silent; he remembered very well that he had carefully refrained from hinting at the matter.

"Had you confided your intentions to me, I should of course have respected them; but how was I to hazard such a guess? More especially as your letters were full of rhapsodies about a captain's wife with golden hair and a warm heart."

"Poor Madame Bároly!" exclaimed Kazimir. "What about her?"

"Ah, well, what about her? That is just the question; it looked remarkably as if there was something about Madame Bároly."

Kazimir's scorn all but choked him at the moment;

he gave his brother a bitterly contemptuous glance, and turned his head away.

"You see, therefore, that in face of your flirtation with the captain's pretty wife, it was rather hard to expect *anybody* to look upon anything else as serious."

"I had no flirtation with the captain's wife."

"Your friendship, then," conceded Lucyan.

"My friendship was with her husband."

"But he was shot very soon, was he not? and the pretty wife became a pretty widow."

"I see," said Kazimir, pale with rage; "you frightened her with that. Poor child! And yet she might have trusted me after that evening; after we said good-bye to each other in the salt-mine."

"Yes, I heard about the salt-mine," said Lucyan, covering his sneer with a smile. "Don't be alarmed; I am not narrow-minded enough to be hard upon her about that little escapade. Most girls have done something foolish in their day,—and, after all, a kiss is neither here nor there."

Kazimir, to whom these words seemed like the blasphemous desecration of a sanctuary, stood and panted for breath, unable to speak.

"I had some difficulty, though," Lucyan was saying, with that same faint smile, "to make her aunt see the thing in its true light; she was so inexpressibly shocked; it was really hard work to get her to under-

stand that that was just your way of going on, and that you meant nothing by it."

"I meant everything by it," gasped Kazimir, trembling with passion.

"She would insist that her niece was compromised."

"Compromised by *me!*" cried Kazimir, with a bitter laugh. He had believed hitherto that the sacrifice of his life to save the faintest breath from falling on Xenia's fame would have been but a small thing; now, it seemed this was all a mistake. His own conduct was being painted for him in the blackest of black hues. *He* had compromised her! *he* had wronged her! Had he really been such a monster? he asked himself aghast. Was it he who had been injuring her, while it was Lucyan who was her real protector? "No, it cannot be, it shall not be!" he burst out afresh; "it is impossible, monstrous! it could never be! She has been frightened, bewitched, poor child! She belonged to me before she belonged to you!"

"If there was any promise," began Lucyan.

"Promise? No, there was no promise; she was to wait for me if she loved me. She does not love me; she does not love me!" cried poor Kazimir; and he flung himself, face foremost on the table, crushing the roses which lay there with the weight of his arms, and, despite of his manhood, and his twenty-six years,

he burst into bitter sobs. He was shaken to the very depth of his soul; but though shaken, he was not stunned: that mercy was not granted him, as it is given to many weak men. The feeble patient faints under the operator's knife, and is spared the moment of agony. But the patient to be pitied is he who retains his senses, and with them the keen realisation of each cut. Kazimir's sensations were intensified rather than deadened. He saw now, and he believed. He wondered how he could suffer this and be still alive; he wondered how he could see his brother standing by and not kill him.

Lucyan leant alongside, motionless. For a bridegroom, on the eve of his wedding-day, it must be confessed that he was bearing a good deal, and with an admirable patience. He had known that there would be a burst of reproaches, though he had not known that it would come on this day; but he quailed a little at the violence of this. As he watched the heaving of Kazimir's shoulders, it would perhaps not be fair to say that he did not feel for his brother; but neither would it be true to say that he did not feel more keenly for the roses than for his brother. Each flower-head which he saw flattened under Kazimir's arms gave him a distinct stab of pain. He was moved to spring forward and rescue the ill-used roses with tender hands, but he was wise enough to see that such

a course would be unsafe. It was a sacrifice; but Lucyan was quite able to make such a sacrifice when necessary. Men, in moments of frantic grief, require to be humoured; and Lucyan was generous enough to humour his brother at this moment. It gave him no pleasure to see this suffering, for in every undisguised display of human feeling there is something which ruffles the delicacy of a fastidious taste; and Lucyan's taste was of the most fastidious. Neither was his cruelty a vulgar cruelty; it was only that having one plain object in life, he made his way towards it, treading upon every obstacle in his path. That the obstacle to be trodden happened to be a brother was a mere accident of circumstance; and no really great man allows himself to be deterred from his end by a mere accident of circumstance. As he stood now, watching his brother in this paroxysm of grief, he was cool enough to look right through the midst of the paroxysm, and to see that the victory in the struggle would be on his own side.

But to Kazimir there was no future and no past: he could not see an inch beyond the black night of his misery. Slowly he began to recover from his burst of tears. He had not cried for ten years; his eyes had been wet when he left his mother for the last time; but not since he had stood behind the beech-tree that autumn morning, and watched his comrades riding off

towards Hungary, had he wept as he was weeping now. Each of these long-sealed tears was drawn with pain. His face was haggard with the strain when at length he raised his head. He had believed in her so firmly, and he had loved her so truly, and now he knew that that love which already was bearing blossoms must be cut off, root and branch, to wither without fruit. He leant his head upon his hand, and drew a long trembling breath.

Around the brothers the shadows were growing long. The setting sun was shedding the last of its brilliancy over the earth, like a princely prodigal who has spent his gold with liberal hand all day, and at nightfall, finding that he has much to spare, throws it recklessly out, lavishing it upon such worthless things as weeds and wayside flowers, gilding the very grass as he scatters his largess through the forest. There was scarcely a tree which did not stand belted with a ring of pure gold, nor a leaf which did not flaunt with a golden edge, or upon which golden spots were not dancing. The blue-winged vetches stretched to reach the gold, or stooped to catch it as it fell; even the yellow ragwort, greedy of more brightness, were gilding themselves over again; and the daisies, too short to stretch, scrambled for the fallen pieces, like the children in a quarrelling crowd.

It was Lucyan who first broke silence. "Come,

Kazio," he said; and no one could have complained of the want of gentleness in his tone: "we are men after all, and not boys. I am sorry for you; but neither I nor any one else can alter this. It is Fate whom you must accuse, and not me. Just take an impartial review of the situation. Here am I, an unpretending farmer, who has never been out of his country. My wish is to settle down quietly in life. I am thrown in the way of a girl of suitable fortune and birth, to whom I become atttached: finding my attachment returned, and finding, too, that she is free, is there anything strange or unnatural in that I should marry her?"

Kazimir, staring fixedly before him, and tearing rose after rose to pieces, had no answer to give. What Lucyan said sounded both sensible and kind.

"And," continued the other, in a lighter tone, "considering that the families on both sides are perfectly agreed, and that all arrangements are fixed for the quiet wedding, is it not a little hard upon the unpretending farmer, if, on the eve of the wedding, his brilliant soldier-brother returns in a flush of excitement, and, bursting in upon the scene, comports himself like a maniac, and storms and talks of treachery?—all upon the strength of having once stolen a kiss in a salt-mine? Where is the treachery now,—eh, Kazimir?"

Kazimir frowned, and threw a bit of stick at a

blackbird, who, perched on a fir-branch, was singing his evening song hard by.

"What is that for, Kazimir?" smiled Lucyan.

"Bah! he is singing all out of tune," said Kazimir, with a shiver.

"You would have thought as I do," continued Lucyan, "if the cases had been reversed, and you had been the successful man, and I the disappointed one. And is it not rather unreasonable of you, after having gone on playing knave of hearts all round, and amusing yourself with a pretty widow in Italy, to come home, and expect to find everything unchanged? *Qui va à la chasse, perd sa place*, you know."

"I have told you that I was not amusing myself with the pretty widow."

"*Consoling* the pretty widow, then," corrected Lucyan; and his smile began to reappear. "Come now, you are beginning to see sense, are you not? Seriously, Kazimir, you do not wish that we should all change brides at the last moment, as in a French *vaudeville?*"

"All I know is," replied Kazimir, sullenly, "that the wedding shall not take place until I hear from her own lips that she wishes it."

"Do you not think," said Lucyan, after a pause, "that it will be better, easier for you, if you left here at once, before the wedding? It would be a hard

moment; I doubt your strength to bear it. People might be a little surprised, of course; but that does not signify, even if they talk——"

"Talk! talk about her!" cried Kazimir, starting from the bench; "no, they shall have no food for their chatter. I shall not go; I shall stay. Why should I not bear it? Other men have borne it too, and remained alive; have they not, Lucyan? I am a man, after all; I am strong; I shall get over it; I shall live it down!" All this time he was stamping about the moss, with his hands convulsively clenched, and his lips twitching under his efforts at calmness.

"Ha, ha!" he burst out, with a harsh laugh. "That bullet, that bullet at Magenta! it was not for Bároly that it was meant; it was for me. How much more convenient for every one if I had been shot! how much pleasanter for her!"

He stood still for a moment; then, without looking at his brother, turned, and took two rapid strides down the path.

"Where are you going, Kazimir?" asked Lucyan, gravely; and in a moment he was by his brother's side, and had laid a hand on his arm.

"I am going to her," said Kazimir, defiantly. "I insist upon seeing her; you cannot prevent me, Lucyan: she is not your wife yet."

"I do not wish to prevent you," was the calm

answer. It was Lucyan's system always to give way on every point except the one at stake.

"I shall see her alone," said Kazimir.

"Of course you shall see her alone. I can trust her with you, Kazimir. You are not going to persuade her to—do anything foolish?"

"I am not going to persuade her to do anything at all. I am going to ask for an answer only." And Kazimir shook off his brother's hand, and strode away down the path.

"I have made him harmless," muttered Lucyan to himself, as, worn out with the last half-hour, he threw himself upon the deserted bench. The great secret of success in life is to hit upon your neighbour's weak point, and beggar him by trading upon it. Lucyan had found out long ago that Kazimir's weak point was his honour.

And Kazimir, meanwhile, was striding down the path, through the midst of the twilight shadows. The forest had been full of gold when he entered it this evening; and now that he turned back, the forest was all dark.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE LOSING SUIT.

"Sie nannten mich den Bösen,
Und Du hast Alles geglaubt."
—HEINE.

. . . "I have given thee much,
I gave thee what I can ne'er recall;
I gave my heart, I gave my peace,
Oh heaven! I gave thee all."
—COLERIDGE.

"OH, why have you come back?" sobbed Xenia, when she and Kazimir were face to face and alone. "Why have you come back to make every one unhappy? It was all going right before!"

The question had stared him in the face so often to-day, that he began to put it to himself, Why had he come back? Again it struck him most forcibly that that bullet at Magenta had hit the wrong mark; the right mark should have been his heart. Two women would have been the happier for it; one, because she would have kept an adored husband—the other, because she would have lost an inconvenient lover. Scarcely an hour ago he had been laughing to himself

at the thought of the surprise and the pleasure which his sudden appearance was to bring, and now he was already wondering whether the news of his death would not have been more welcome than the news of his arrival. The other greetings he could afford to do without, but Xenia's greeting stabbed him to the heart. Nothing to-day had hurt him so much as it hurt him now to see her fear of him. He had seen her look as frightened only once before—on the day when they had seen the wolf in the forest. That day she had clung to him for protection, and to-day it seemed as though she wished to be protected against him. He had come into her presence bitter and hot, with heavy reproaches burning on his lips; but the very first glance disarmed him. Her weakness broke his strength; the tearful eyes, raised to him in terrified pleading, took the edge off his cutting words. What can a man do when a woman cowers before him, not raising a finger to defend herself as she awaits the blow, saying in every line of her shrinking figure, "Strike me, if you will!" and doing nothing but looking frightened and defenceless and beautiful? It would be like striking a child; and Kazimir could not do it.

"Do not cry," he said, speaking as gently as though the guilt of faithlessness had been on his side, and not on hers. "Your tears hurt me, Xenia; I am not going to scold you. I only want to know whether you can

explain to me how it comes to be thus——" Unconsciously he was reasoning, as one reasons with a child, and unconsciously, too, he was suppressing every outward sign of his own suffering for fear of increasing hers. "I want only to know whether you have forgotten what you said then,—that time in the salt-mine; you said that you loved me, you know?"

"The salt-mine!" She looked up with scared blue eyes, gazing at him in a sort of terror through her tears. "Please, never speak of the salt-mine again. I did not know it was so wrong of me, or I should not have done it, really."

"Who told you it was wrong?"

"Oh, my aunt, and my guardian, and everybody; they all scolded me so much, and they would have scolded me more, but Lucyan"—she broke off just here, and glanced nervously around her—"is that not Lucyan coming?" she said quickly.

There was no one coming, but Kazimir had received a fresh cut: was she so desperately in love with Lucyan that she could not keep her attention from him for five minutes? "Lucyan begged for me," continued Xenia, "and he said that it was not so much my fault as——" she hesitated, afraid of hurting his feelings.

"As mine," finished Kazimir, grimly. "That is what they said, was it not? Well, perhaps they were right;

perhaps it was all my fault; perhaps it was wrong of me to have told you in the salt-mine that I loved you; but I *did* tell you so, and you answered my question with *yes*. Even your aunt and your guardian could not unsay the words, could they?"

"It was a mistake," sobbed Xenia, incoherently, "it was all a mistake; and I was not sure; and you hurried me so; and Lucyan said that girls never know their own minds. And then I asked Vizia; but she was so hard and so unkind (she is never kind now, as she used to be), she said she was the last person in the world who could advise me, and that I must decide for myself: she told me that if I could doubt for one moment, I could not really—love you. And then everybody pressed me, and I could not help it—I *really* could not help it; and then"—the quivering voice was choked in tears.

"And you never thought," broke out Kazimir, with a swelling heart, "that during all that time I was living only on our last words of parting, that the thought of you was my whole happiness, and that the hope of seeing you again was the only thing which kept up my courage? You never thought that I was thanking God on my knees every evening for having let me live another day which brought me nearer to you? You never thought that, Xenia?"

"But," said Xenia, checking her tears for a moment,

"it was not like that, you know. You did not think of me like that."

"Shall I swear it to you?"

"Oh no, please, do not swear; but they told me that"—she faltered and grew crimson.

"What did they tell you, Xenia?"

"They said that you did not care for me any longer; that you cared for somebody else."

"They dared to tell you that?"

"A beautiful lady with golden hair," added Xenia, with a quick uplifting of her head, and the tiniest touch of feminine jealousy in the midst of her helpless sobs.

Madame Bároly! Madame Bároly again! dressed up into a sort of scarecrow to frighten away this innocent child. There was something so supremely and grimly humorous about the idea, that Kazimir could almost have found it in him to laugh out loud, only that his mood was more akin to tears.

"And you were actually got to believe that?"

"I saw it in your letters to Lucyan; I saw,"—in the midst of her tears, Kazimir could but catch the words "golden-haired beauty," and "charming." He was on the point of breaking into vehement explanations, but he checked himself in time. It struck him just then that explanations can do good only when they have a chance of being understood.

"And if, Xenia," he said with forced quiet, "if you had known that it was all untrue, and that I had been faithful to you the whole time, what would you have done then?"

"Oh, I don't know; please do not ask me." This phase of the case was rather too deep for Xenia to fathom. "What is the use of thinking of that now? Hadn't we better not talk of it at all? I am so sorry that you mind it so much; but then, if you really had cared for me in that way, you would not have gone away to the war, or have stayed there so long. It was all a mistake, and I meant nothing at all that time,—nothing at all, really," she added, most earnestly. "It was all so long ago, you know."

"It was all just four months and a half ago," thought Kazimir. Four months! Yes—a long time it had been to wait in; but ah, what a short time to love in!

"Of course it was a very long time ago," said Kazimir slowly, sighing as he spoke; "but do you not think that it would have been kinder to me if you had let me know sooner that you had ceased to care for me?"

Xenia raised her eyes to him in genuine surprise.

"But you knew that already."

"No, I did not guess it," said Kazimir, with a smile which was ghastly.

"But then you never read my message?"

"Which message?" he questioned with a gleam of hope.

"I wrote it at the bottom of Lucyan's letter, because I thought that, after all, you might still be thinking of it a little," said Xenia, humbly; "and you sent me good wishes in return."

"I never got that letter," said Kazimir, after a pause; perhaps this was one of the unreceived letters, of which Lucyan seemed to have written so many; "and the good wishes I sent were not meant for you."

"You did not get the message? what a pity! But it does not make any difference now, you know."

"Difference? No; but it tells me at least that you were not deceiving me. You really thought that I knew everything; is that quite true, Xenia?"

It was quite true; her lips said it, and her blue eyes said it too, as she raised them in childish frankness. For that small mercy Kazimir could be thankful; she had not meant to deceive him.

"You love my brother, then?" he asked abruptly; for he could not be quiet on her account, until he had heard that assurance from herself.

She started at the question, just as she had started a minute ago, when she thought to hear Lucyan's step. Twisting her wet handkerchief between her fingers,

she answered hurriedly, "Of course I do; I must; why do you ask me?" She grew red, as she said it, and then the bright flush fading, left her very pale.

"And you mean to marry him to-morrow?" He was not quieted yet. There was a strange nervousness about her; perhaps but the result of this trying scene.

"Of course I do;" she looked at him in genuine surprise. "My dress came back two days ago; and my calling-cards are all printed."

Kazimir turned aside with a groan of discouragement, and with a feeling of helplessness upon him. There was nothing more about which to argue, and he would have preferred to spare her more pain, by leaving her at once. But Xenia heard the groan, and it set her off crying again. She could not bear to witness any suffering, and she did all her best to smooth this away. She wished he would not mind it so much, and really it was not her fault; and it was such a consolation to think that even had they wanted to marry, her aunt and her guardian would never have allowed it. They wished her to make a quiet steady marriage, and they both said that Lucyan was just the right sort of man; and that they were quite sure that she would be happy with him; and that soldiers were never steady; and that it was very wrong of Kazimir

to have taken advantage of her inexperience in the salt-mine,—and he must promise never, *never* to mention the word again, for it made her quite hot to think of it; and they had also said that no honourable man ever speaks to a girl first, but always to her guardians, just as Lucyan had done; and Lucyan had said this, and Vizia had said that; and would he please not be angry with her any more, for it was so unpleasant when people were angry;—and so on, and so on, round and round in a tearful circle. It was so easy to read the history of that sobbed-out narrative—it all lay so clear to the light of day; the little scruples, the little doubts, the little struggles, the little sufferings of the little heart. Angry with her? Why, in heaven's name, should he be angry with her? Could she have acted otherwise than she had done? She had been conscious of no harm; she had only been too sweet, and too gentle, and too yielding, and too trustful, and too good altogether. So willing was she to please everybody, that her very tears and attitude seemed to say how glad she would have been to marry both brothers—had circumstances only permitted it — and thus make everybody comfortable. True, she had done him the greatest wrong which a woman can do a man; but she did not know that she had done it; and she had done it so that it seemed only to have raised her nearer to the level of an angel. He had given her

the very flower of his love, and she had taken it with the smile of an innocent child; and with the smile of an innocent child, too, she had cast it aside. She had not cruelly plucked it or played with it; but she had been told to throw it aside, for that it was a bad and poisonous flower, not good for little children—and she had obeyed; and now she was crying for fear of being scolded for what she had done. Could there be any talk of anger here? It would be as reasonable to find fault with a snowdrop for not having thorns, or to quarrel with a seraph because he cannot suffer pain. The sternest mood must needs have been softened in face of these pleading eyes, and Kazimir's mood was not stern. When he left her at last, it was with the general impression that every one was to blame, excepting her.

Indignation burned still hot in his heart, but not against her. So hotly did it burn him, though, that it pressed him to find some outlet for it; his heart cried out to be revenged on some one. The some one was not hard to find. As he left Xenia he stumbled straight on her cousin—the very victim he needed. Vizia, who was so much harder, and stronger, and better able to take care of herself, ought to have taken care of that poor child.

Here there was nothing to disarm him,—no pleading eyes, no penitent tears, no shrinking, and no fear.

With set and hardened face Vizia confronted him, standing every inch of her ground in sullen defiance. Why had she refused her advice to her cousin? why had she not taken better care of that frail flower? why had she not prevented all this misery? he asked her, amidst the torrent of his reproaches. He had confided his secret to her, thinking that she would watch over his interests; he had always looked up to her as a true friend and a sensible woman, and now she had cheated his friendship. To the poor tortured woman every word was a stab; but she had no fear of breaking down now. This cruelty was not nearly so cruel as his kindness; nor did she fear his hard words half as much as his soft ones, nor flinch at sight of his frowns, though she trembled when she thought of his smiles. She was strong enough to bear his enmity, but she was too weak to bear his friendship.

"Can I make wax into iron, or pools into oceans?" she asked, with scornful lip, as he paused in his wild upbraidings. Never in his life had Kazimir spoken thus harshly to a woman; but neither had he ever before been thus frantic with grief. Coming straight from the presence of that timid beauty who was his ideal of woman, the strength and self-reliance of Vizia struck him almost as it would have struck him in a man; and he was as hard upon her, therefore, as he could have been upon a man.

"What was I to do?" she asked, defiantly. "For what is it you blame me?"

"For not having written to tell me the truth; for not having let me know that she was being robbed from me; for having allowed her to be frightened by ridiculous stories about me—for, of course, you also believed that romance of the pretty widow?"

She met his eyes steadily, and steadily, though very low, she answered—

"No, I did not believe it."

"Never for a moment?"

"Never for a moment."

"Strange! but what good does that to me, since you did not convince her? Oh, if you had sent me but one word to warn me of my danger!"

"Was it clear that there existed a danger? What else could I think but that you had given her up?"

"You might have guessed that of my own will I would not give her up while I had life remaining."

"And," questioned Vizia, over whose face, resolute as it was, there shot a spasm of pain at his last words, "it is true, then, that you knew nothing of this? that you were in the dark till now?"

"Entirely in the dark. I came home in perfect confidence, thinking that she was waiting for me, and that it was you who were to be my brother's wife."

"And you would have welcomed me as your

brother's wife?" said Vizia, calmly, driving the dagger-point deeper into her heart, with that savage instinct of self-torture which belonged to her nature.

"Of course I should. I sent you good wishes in my letter."

"I suspected it," she said, quickly.

"You suspected what?"

"That your brother had wronged you."

"Every one has wronged me, excepting her; she is innocent."

"Listen," said Vizia, coming a step nearer. "You have given up your rights to your brother, have you not? You have signed them away to him blindly?"

"What does it matter?" said Kazimir, impatiently. "Nothing can give me her back again."

"You have signed them away blindly?" she repeated, unheeding.

"Yes, I have signed them away blindly, as you call it; what about it?"

"Only this, that you have done an act of folly."

"I chose to do it," he said, moodily; for the Auditor's words came ringing in his ears just now.

"You have helped your brother to marry Xenia. If you had not signed that paper, her guardians would never have given her away. It is too late to warn you; but,"—Vizia drew a hard breath, and between

her teeth she muttered, "your brother is a bad man."

He started, not so much because the words had frightened him by their strangeness, but rather because they seemed to him so curiously familiar. Had any one ever said them before? Surely it must be so? Why otherwise should he seem to know them so well? But precisely because of this start of recognition, he felt more inclined to blame Vizia for being the cause of it. He was unreasonable in the excess of his pain; he chose to see nothing in Vizia's strangely-put warning but the fears of a suspicious mind, tinged perhaps by feminine jealousy: for Lucyan had paid attention to her first, and women, reasoned Kazimir, are always jealous of one another. He asked her somewhat haughtily what right she had to speak thus of his brother; and for fear, perhaps, of hearing more against Lucyan, he left her as abruptly as he had accosted her.

There was no one remaining to attack but Marcin; but even poor Marcin was not spared. Why had he, along with the others, conspired to keep Kazimir in the dark? Here the question was met by a puzzled stare. "But I told you all about it, Kazimir."

"When, in heaven's name?"

"But in my letter, of course; and you said you did

not mind it. I took so much trouble to make it clear, for I did not want you to come here with a cat in a bag, although I knew they would be angry with me for letting the pig out of the poke."

The giant-phantom, erroneously conjured up by the clearness of Marcin's letter, rose once more at the words. How happy would Kazimir have been now could he have had his giant-phantom back again!

CHAPTER XXIII.

PARTNERS PARTED.

. . . . "We still have slept together,
Rose at an instant, learned, played, ate together."
—*As You Like It.*

Had Rogdanovics's body been unable to rest quiet in its grave, and had Rogdanovics's spirit desired to revisit the world, the spot which it would have selected to haunt should have been, without doubt, that on which the *Rhizanelkometer* lay rusting, forgotten, and unheeded. The *Rhizanelkometer* was the identical machine which had cost Rogdanovics his life on that March afternoon, when he strained a blood-vessel in working it. Here, therefore, should his spirit have hovered at nightfall, and moaned at midnight. The *Rhizanelkometer* was the murderer, and should not have been spared the ghost of the murdered man.

Lodniki showed many signs of the change come over it: six months ago it had borne on its face a false flush of riches; and now that was faded,—there re-

mained but the real paleness of poverty. The place might be compared to an oversized canvas, where colour and material have fallen far short of the space to be covered. Empty stables, neglected pathways, unfinished buildings, told the story loudly enough; but nothing told it so vividly or so pathetically as did the rusting machine, in its wreck and abandonment. It lay just where it had stood in that March afternoon when it did its last work. No one had thought it worth while to have it removed. Beside it the oak-stump, which it had but half gripped, and failed to wrench from the earth, stood its ground still undisturbed. The helpless giant lay stretched at full length; his huge frame rotting slowly, his iron claws red with rust, his unwieldy limbs falling to pieces under the damp of rain and dew. The flowers had conspired to bind him; the red nettles had choked up his wheels; the blue chicory laughingly held him prisoner in its arms; the white bindweeds, smothering wherever they creep, had twisted themselves round and round, and roped him tight with their cords. Even the oak-stump itself, like a prisoner reprieved from the gallows, had picked up its spirits, and shot out a few green sprouts into the face of the executioner, who had failed in his stroke. In the twilight of this July evening, it might have been thought from afar that the ghost had come at last to haunt this chosen spot; but those figures

were no ghosts. Vizia and Xenia were lingering beside the fallen giant. They were alone; for the visitors had left, and as yet those two were strangely silent. Vizia, standing with her back against an iron wheel, gazed straight in front of her towards the shadows of the forest. This barrier of coldness between them—and it was a barrier which had sprung up weeks ago—was her work, and not Xenia's. Xenia would fain have clung to her cousin as of old; but when, in her childish doubts, Xenia had come to her for advice, something within the elder girl had made her refuse any word of help. Despite the entreating eyes, and despite the hands falteringly held out, she had made her heart hard as a stone. She had turned away, so as not to see the eyes, and she had pushed back the soft fingers which would have clung to her in their need.

Kazimir's words of to-day had startled her into self-analysis. Why had she refused her help? Why had she turned her heart into a stone? Was it, she asked herself with horror,—was it that she had dared unconsciously to hope for herself that which her cousin was throwing aside as worthless?

Her pride revolted at the thought of such meanness. And yet it must be so, she argued with merciless persistency; for other women—nobler and better women—she told herself, would have said to themselves a

hundred times devoutly, "Oh that she could be made worthy of him!" while Vizia had never said it to herself once. She had seen how her cousin was throwing aside a true diamond, and picking up a false stone in its stead; and she had looked on in sullen silence. "If she does not know the real stone when she sees it, why should I be the one to tell her?" Such had been her question. She had been conscious of nothing but contempt and jealousy; so she told herself to-night. And this hope, this torturing serpent of hope which had wound itself unbidden round her heart, she would look it in the face to-day, and crush it dead before it had grown strong enough to do her harm. "I am plain, unamiable, and bad-tempered," she repeated to herself with a sort of savage zest. "I am all this and more; do I still dare to hope? Bah! he will love her with all the more hopeless love because he has been robbed of her: he will be truer to her than if she had been his wife."

Xenia's voice broke in upon the train of these bitter reflections.

"Has it not been a dreadful day?" she asked timidly, just as she had asked, "Has it not been a charming day?" on the evening of that on which Kazimir had all but confessed his love to her. Vizia, her face turned aside, answered that it had been dreadful.

"I feel quite tired with it," ventured Xenia again. "I was so frightened when they told me that I was to speak to Kazimir Bielinski; I thought he would be so angry; and my aunt said it was not safe, and that she was quite sure he would kill me."

"But he did not, I suppose," remarked Vizia, drily.

"Oh no; he was really so kind; and I had quite forgotten how kind he could be: it is such a pity that he will—will think of me like that;" and Xenia hung her head, and blushed the most beautiful blush as she played with her curl. "It is so foolish of him, is it not, Vizia?"

"Very," said Vizia, coldly, while her hand tightened on the rusty chain which dangled beside her, creaking a little as it swayed in the evening breeze.

"He is so handsome," said Xenia, with a faint sigh of undefined regret. "What a pity he is a soldier! I am so sorry for him; he seemed to mind so much——" The dimpled chin went down, and two tears of pure and tender pity ran over her cheek. But when she had cried for a minute or so, she remembered that it was her wedding-day to-morrow. "And it would never do to have red eyes on my wedding-day," she said, between smiles and tears; "it would look so ill with the white dress, would it not, Vizia?"

Vizia said that of course it would; and Xenia sat silent for a moment.

"Did you read the answer which they sent me about the wedding-day in the 'Journal des Demoiselles?'" she presently began.

"I never read the 'Journal des Demoiselles,' said Vizia, stiffly.

"I signed myself 'Fleur d'Orange,'" volunteered Xenia; "and I asked—for it is so difficult to know—what one's manner should be like on the wedding-day; and the answer is,—'Tâchez de conserver un juste milieu: pas trop de réserve et pas trop de familiarité.'"

Vizia made no remark.

"I wonder," reflected Xenia aloud, while she pulled off a head of blue chicory, "what they mean exactly by 'trop de familiarité'?"

But even the vastness of question as to what the 'Journal des Demoiselles' might call *réserve*, and what *familiarité*, did not seem to have aroused Vizia's interest. She leant where she stood motionless, her head bent, and her eyes fixed before her. Xenia's lip quivered as she gazed at her cousin through the dusk; she had not had a kiss nor a caress for so long.

"Vizia,"—she crept up softly to her cousin's side,—"tell me why you are so changed, so unkind to me. Won't you kiss me now? I am going away to-morrow, you know."

"I know," said Vizia, in a whisper.

A caressing hand was travelling over her cheek. "Tell me what has changed you so, Vizia. Oh, Vizia, you have been crying! your eyes are quite wet; you are crying still."

"Hush! I am not crying," said Vizia, more fiercely than softly.

"Tell me what it is," begged Xenia.

"I cannot." Vizia shook her head, while with one hand she stripped off the trails of white bindweed beside her. She could not tell Xenia what her secret was, nor explain that she was crying because she yearned for one drop of that cup which Xenia had pushed away, not caring to taste. But the tears alone had done her good; that stony hardness was somewhat melted. The touch of that soft hand on her cheek cooled her heated spirit. Remorse seized upon her at the thought of the many caresses which she had refused within these last days and weeks. Years ago, when they had both been children, Vizia had once, in a nursery quarrel, thrown herself upon her cousin and bitten her in the arm. Not half-a-dozen drops of blood had flowed; but never had remorse been so bitter, nor had ever so complete and even violent atonement been made for an injury. In a frantic fit of penitence the culprit had insisted on presenting all her toys to the victim; and neither arguments, nor persuasions, nor threats, had been capable of removing

Vizia from the side of Xenia's bed, where, child as she was, she maintained her unnecessary watch all night, keeping her eyes wide open through sheer force of will.

Her life since then had been more or less a repetition of that stormy incident. She was constantly biting Xenia's arm; and though she had now no toys to give, she made up for it by giving her love, and caresses, and penitence, with the same vehement generosity with which she had given her large wax doll and her broken tea-set. She hung perpetually between the extremes of jealousy and love; for she passionately wished to have her cousin's beauty and sweetness, and the homage which these provoked; and what was this but jealousy? But, again, she would willingly have sacrificed the use of one of her limbs to preserve to Xenia the perfection of a single feature; and what could this be but boundless love? Daily she sinned, and daily also she walked in sackcloth and ashes for her sins. This time she had been a little longer in putting on the sackcloth and strewing the ashes; but all the more complete was her penitence now. Her embrace was so vehement that it hurt the gentle Xenia. It was hard to give up the child to whom she had been mother and sister at once. And she had been more than that. Since they had reached the age of reason, Vizia had been Xenia's

calendar and memory, her book of stock references, and even her conscience. All this she had been until the day when Xenia had asked of her deputy-conscience, "Am I to marry Lucyan Bielinski?" That day the conscience had refused its answer; and from that day it was that Xenia had begun to take another conscience, and another calendar, and another memory to help her. And it was because she mistrusted that other conscience, that in Vizia's heart there arose a pang of fear just now. Her cousin was to be taken from her, and he who was to take her away was the man of whom she had said to-day, "He is a bad man." No wonder if in Vizia's embrace there was the vehemence of terror.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE WINNING SUIT.

"Sie wurde bleich, der Priester sprach das Wort,
Ich aber stand dabei und musste schweigen."
—GEIBEL.

IF any one had told Kazimir this morning that, in less than twenty-four hours' time he would be standing by, to see Xenia married to his brother, he would most certainly have either knocked that person down, or else laughed at him as a maniac.

And yet it was so. Pale and rigid, with tightened lips and gloomily-fixed eyes, numb with grief, but yet alive, yet able to breathe and to stand, Kazimir was witness of the marriage. He did not rush forward and tear the bride from the altar—he did not, at the last fatal moment, either stab or strangle his brother —he did not call out, "I forbid it!" when he saw them kneel together on the step — he did not even start when the priest, in the Polish fashion, asked of the bride, "Have you ever given your faith to an-

other man?" and Xenia's trembling voice answered, "No."

The few guests who had been bidden to this strictly private wedding saw only that there was a tall, silent, and sunburnt young man, who looked rather out of humour, or perhaps only tired with his journey. Two people only, knew that he was not tired with his journey, and saw what he was suffering; but neither of these two was the bride.

And when it was all over and the carriage stood at the door, Xenia coming round to say good-bye to each guest, came round to him in his turn. There was a little flush of excitement on her cheek, and a little flutter in her manner; but when she came up to Kazimir, the bright eyes grew deprecating at once. "You are not angry any more?" she asked softly; but before Kazimir had found voice to answer, Lucyan was beside them.

"The horses will not stand any longer," he said, as he drew on his gloves,—then looking at her, he added, "Put on your other hat, *ma belle* Xenia; this one hides your curls too much." Laughingly he touched one of her chestnut curls, and Kazimir, at sight of that movement, bit his lip till the blood started. He would have liked to throw himself between them, so as to protect Xenia from the insolence of that admiring gaze, which, it seemed to him, must scorch her. In

Xenia's face the flush had died out the moment that Lucyan spoke. She raised her eyes to him, meekly, as a dog might to his master; her will, and her power of voluntary movement even, seemed gone from her. Without a word she turned submissively, and went to do as she had been bidden.

"How she must love him!" thought Kazimir; for he had not yet learnt to know the difference between free love and that which is given by the snake to the snake-charmer.

The two brothers stood silent side by side, while both watched Xenia from the room. Then Kazimir turned to Lucyan. "If you are not kind to her," he said, with a strange calmness, "I think, Lucyan, I shall kill you."

"I shall take care, then, not to be killed," said Lucyan, smiling, as he drew out his gloves. "I mean to give her food and clothes—very pretty clothes too," he added with emphasis; "and what do women want more than that?"

Kazimir turned away in silence, but Lucyan detained him.

"Are we to part as enemies or as friends, Kazimir?" he asked, and the half-laugh in his voice seemed to say that he was equally ready to part as one or as the other, just as his brother preferred. "We shall see you again soon, shall we not?"

"No, you shall not see me again soon," said Kazimir. "I would rather stay away from home just now."

"Well, then, you will shake hands, at least," and Lucyan, still smiling, held out his hand.

Kazimir stood gazing down at the outstretched hand with a frown. It was a finely shaped hand, delicate and white; and yet Kazimir stared down at it in a sort of horror. He put out his own, then drew it back and turned abruptly away.

"Excuse me, Lucyan," he said, hoarsely, "but I think we had better not shake hands. I can forgive her, but I cannot forgive you."

"Just as you like," answered Lucyan, still smiling. But in the next instant that half-sneering smile faded from his face. He looked at his brother curiously. "You will not shake hands?" he said, slowly. "Well, perhaps you are right."

PART II.

CHAPTER I.

UNDERPLAY.

"Nay, I will win my wager better yet;
And show more sign of her obedience,
Her new-built virtue and obedience."
—SHAKESPEARE.

It was Easter-time, and a man said to his wife—

"Have you ordered the *baba*[1] for the *Swieta*[2]*?*"

The wife, who was studying her complexion in the glass, instead of giving out raisins, and flour, and eggs in the store-room, as every Polish housewife is bound to do at Easter-time, answered with a start, "No, I was waiting till my cousin came; I never can remember the quantities."

"I wonder when you will begin to remember the quantities," answered the husband; "by the time your curls are grey, I suppose. How long have we been

[1] A species of cake, baked in a high and narrow shape, and peculiar to Easter-time in Poland. This same word also signifies *grandmother*, also *old woman* generally.

[2] Feast-day.

married? Four years this summer, and I do not believe you know *kasza* from barley yet."

"I shall go and order the *baba* at once, since you wish it." The wife rose with flurried obedience, and the complexion, no longer reflected in the glass, deepened to crimson.

Her husband watched her till she had reached the door, and then called her back. "You know, of course, exactly how many *baba* you are to order?"

The wife grew more flurried, and more anxious to obey. "I forgot to count; let me see, how many are we? One, two, three," she counted nervously on her fingers, "four, five, six. I think we had six last Easter."

"We need one more than we had last Easter," remarked the husband.

The wife was thrown off her balance. She did not understand why they should require one *baba* more than they had last Easter; and she did not dare to ask her husband directly.

"Let me see:" she counted again. "One for you, one for me, one for your brother, one for my cousin, one for my aunt, and then the little one for Wandusia. That is six, is it not?" she suggested, humbly.

"Order seven," said the husband, without changing his position, while slowly he passed an ivory comb through his hair, which grew up straight and thick

from his low forehead like a crest,—a serpent's crest, some one had once remarked.

In spite of her humility, and in spite of her submissiveness, this seventh *baba* was simple torture to the curiosity of the wife. A *baba* was to be baked for each member of the family—such was the custom—and the family at this moment numbered exactly six members. For whom then could this seventh *baba*, this mysterious and unexplained *baba*, be intended? She had almost screwed up her courage to the point of putting the question, when her husband spoke again. He told her to come back as soon as she had done with the raisins, and almonds, and eggs, and flour in the store-room, as he wished her to write a letter.

More surprise and more curiosity, mingled with a little fear this time. Her husband very seldom asked her to write a letter; and when he did ask her, the task was performed in fear and trembling; for not the smallest slip was allowed to pass uncensured; each of her school-girlish mistakes had to meet the full blast of his withering sarcasm.

The seventh *baba*, and the letter to be written, seemed to have some hidden link between them. For whom was the *baba?* and to whom was she to write? She speculated so hard upon these questions, that she poured the raisins into the ground coffee by

mistake, and mixed up the coarse and the fine flour without ever noticing it.

When she was told to whom she was to write, her surprise increased tenfold.

"But—but," she ventured in reply, "how can I do that? Would it not be better if you wrote instead?"

"It is just because it would not be better, that I intend you to write," was the answer. "He would not come for the sake of my letter, and he will come for the sake of yours. There is paper, sit down at once."

"Really? Do you mean it really?"

"Do I ever make jokes?"

"But—but, won't he think it very strange?"

"Let him think it what he likes."

"And what am I to call him?"

"His name, of course," said the husband, impatiently.

"And how am I to say it?"

"Any way you like—in your own words. Put in a few pretty phrases about sisterly affection, or any other sort of affection that you prefer. I give you leave to be as affectionate as you like—and I shall not look at your letter; do you understand?"

She understood. That is to say, she understood what she was to do; although she did not in the least understand why she was to do it.

The letter was written, and the seventh *baba* was

baked, and so were many other *baba* all over the country. The flour which was weighed out, and mixed, and put in the oven during these days before Easter, would have been enough to sand the ground of a moderate-sized desert; the milk which flowed in every kitchen, like streams of white blood, might have furnished a respectable ocean; the eggs which were boiled hard in pans and kettles, would handsomely have sufficed to stone to death half a hundred martyrs. The new-born lambs that were beginning to leap over the new-born grass, dotting the green fields with dazzling spots of white, and biting off the daisy buds, as they frisked their fluffy tails, found their whiteness and their innocence rivalled all at once by another host of lambs that started up about this time, and flourished their red-and-blue paper flags out of every village-grocer's window.

But at Tarajow there was not only a grocer but a confectioner. A confectioner who kept pink and white cakes and real macaroons, and concerning whom there existed a tradition that he had once attempted ices and failed in the speculation. Easter was wont to be a busy time for him; for many of the small families of the place ordered their *baba* here to save trouble; but this Easter somehow the trade seemed slack. Many a time did the confectioner, standing at his window, say to himself,—"Here is a person

coming to order his *baba* or *placki*[1] for Easter-day;" but nine times out of ten the person trudged past, and trudged straight up the worn steps of the apothecary's alongside; and ten minutes later he would trudge down again with a bottle of medicine in his hand. After fuming over a dozen such disappointments, the confectioner paid an inquisitive visit to his neighbour.

"What is that medicine of which you sell so much, Jan Wronski?" he asked, with a suspicion of irritability in his voice. "It seems to have a better taste than my *baba* and *placki*."

"It is an astringent," said Jan Wronski, dismally.

The confectioner felt much the wiser.

"And is that your last remedy for hydrophobia?" he inquired loftily, his irritability turning to sarcasm. But Jan Wronski was invulnerable to sarcasm. And just then another person came in by the door with a bottle to be filled.

"How is the *baba?*" asked Jan, as he took the bottle.

The barefooted peasant-girl gave a stupid stare. "The *baba* is dying," she said, in a dull and emotionless voice. "We have been hanging out her grave-clothes to air these two days. She will be dead before

[1] Flat cake, stuffed with dried fruits.

Easter, and the little ones are taking it too. The *matka*[1] has sold her last coral to the Jew, and she cannot show her face on the *Swieta* without them. At the mention of the dying *baba* there was no sign of feeling, or scarcely of understanding; but at the mention of the last coral, the homely face quivered a little.

"What is it?" asked the awed confectioner, dropping both sarcasm and irritability, and turning rather pale. "It is not the fever, is it?"

"Yes, it is the fever," said Jan, corking the bottle tight. "The fever is on us again. There, do you see the *proboszcz*[2] passing? What do you think he is going to do?"

"Bless the *placki* and *baba* for Easter-day," answered the confectioner, with a confectioner's instinct.

"So he will," said Jan, "if they be on his way, but there are other *baba* that need more blessing just now; *baba* that have not come out of your oven, or any other;" and Jan Wronski gave a sort of dismal laugh at the success of his own ghastly joke, and felt almost cheerful at sight of the confectioner's depression.

"The fever!" repeated the confectioner to himself; being a confectioner he was of a soft and impressionable nature, and he slank back home, sighing at the

[1] Mother. [2] Parish priest.

thought of so many vainly-baked *baba*, and of so many *placki* in which the fruit should shrivel, waiting vainly for buyers. He would sell them half-price, he desperately resolved; but why need the fever have come just at Easter?

No one knew why the fever should have come, except that the winter had been a mild winter; and that such a winter brings its punishment in Poland. Just as the lambs were beginning to frisk, and just as the rough-coated foals began to trot along the roads by the side of the cart which their mothers drew; and just as the blue periwinkles were setting to weave bridal wreaths for the peasant-girls to wear, the fever came into the place, borne upon the very wings of the spring breeze, and tainting the gold of the April sunshine with its vicious breath.

It took the old people first, those who should by rights have died in winter, who could only have lived through till spring by a mere chance. It would come back for the young people later, no doubt. In spite of the sunshine, in spite of the early violets, this Easter will be a sad one for many; for the sun will shine on fresh grave-mounds, and the violets will be bound into wreaths to deck them. Many an empty chair will speak of the kind old *baba* who is gone, and many a little one will have sickened and died before even it had time to finish its Easter *baba*.

CHAPTER II.

OUT OF THE GAME.

"I pray thee, mark me,—that a brother should
Be so perfidious."

—*The Tempest.*

On Easter-eve, towards dusk, a hussar on horseback was approaching Tarajow from the west. The country on this side bore a character quite distinct from the richly wooded hills which lay to the east. Here, from the very gates of the town, there stretched a wide expanse, dreary in its flatness; a country of stunted grass on which grew stunted willows. There was a deserted, starved, and melancholy look about this tract of land; the very cows, driven here to graze, looked thin and sad; and the very daisies and buttercups, called out by the April sunshine, appeared to be dwarfs of their race, staring upwards at the sky with pinched faces and weak eyes.

Cutting this dreary stretch almost in two, a sluggish stream lazily dragged its waters along. Dull and slow

and slimy was that stream ; green with floating duck-weed, black with stagnant pools. For years it had licked its banks with sullen tongue till the willow-roots hung bare, and the earth crumbled gently downwards. The stream had no life, save when one of the thin and sad cows came to the edge to drink; or when a frog leaped from the bank to the water with a hop and a splash ; or when a swallow on a gnat-hunt skimmed the sleepy surface.

There was no highroad on this tract—nothing but a footpath led through it ; the stream, running straight across the line of the path, was bridged by a rickety plank with a rickety handrail at one side.

Along this path the hussar was riding this Easter-eve. He rode slowly, at a foot-pace, the reins hanging loose on the horse's neck—so loose that the beast stole many a bite at the willow-bushes in passing. Close at the horse's heels a yellow setter trotted contentedly along. The rider was alone with his horse and his dog, for the meagre cows had been driven home from their meagre pasture more than an hour ago. He looked neither to the right nor the left, at the stunted willows nor at the dwindling daisies ; his eyes were fixed before him in a sort of dreamy abstraction.

It did not seem as if he were in a hurry to reach Tarajow ; and neither was he in a hurry, although he was wending his way there in the mere vague hope of

finding it less dreary than the wretched village station in which he was quartered. An Easter-eve, when every one is cheerful, and comrades are starting for visits home, is apt to make a lonely man feel more lonely; and this man was lonely, with no home where he could go for Easter. The very church-bells, ringing out their Easter peals, seemed to be telling him more distinctly that he was a lonely man. So deep was his abstraction, that he had reached the stream, and did not notice it until the horse stood still.

He gathered up his reins and looked around him. The plank, some paces to the right, was too narrow to cross with safety. He knew that, for he had passed here often before, and touching his horse with the spur, he prepared to cross by his usual ford. The dusk was falling fast, but he could distinctly see that there was a figure on the bridge—a woman, with her back towards him and her head bent downwards as she leant over the rail, looking straight at the water. Apparently the woman was as deeply abstracted as the rider had been a minute ago, for the horse's foot-fall on the grass was not enough to rouse her.

This ford was so rarely disturbed that the green water-weed had ample time to spread itself luxuriantly in the intervals. The spot was thick with weed just now, and it was with a fearful and hesitating step that the horse lifted its feet through the slippery slime

which wound itself and clung about its hoofs. The centre of the stream was reached, and the hateful green stuff had risen to its knees, when the horse all at once gave a start and a plunge, sending a rain of green water over its rider's head. There had been a splash hard by, alongside of the bridge—a much louder splash than the hopping of a frog could make; it sounded like the fall of a heavy stone. Whatever it was, it was enough to frighten a horse in the dusk; and the scared animal snorted and bounded till the green water splashed not only over the rider, but also over the woman on the bridge. She turned at the noise, and for the first time caught sight of these figures on the scene.

"I beg your pardon," said the rider, as he spurred his horse to the opposite bank and reached it. "I have frightened you, I am afraid, and splashed you as well. Down, Trappisto!" as the yellow dog, stopping half-way in the water, threw up its head and gave vent to a few piercing and inimical barks.

"That's all wrong," said the woman on the bridge; "I frightened your horse."

"It was a frog, I think, that frightened him or a falling stone."

"That's all wrong again; the stone did not fall; it was thrown, and I threw it."

"You were throwing it at a frog, I suppose," sug-

gested the rider, who could think of no other probable motive which could induce a young woman to stand on a lonely bridge at nightfall and throw stones into the water.

"At a frog? Not a bit of it; I was throwing it in because I like the good thumping splash it makes. I always throw stones whenever I come here."

The rider, as he drew up his horse beside the bridge, began to feel amused.

"You like the sound of a splash?"

"I like the sound of anything that makes a noise. I am desperately fond of noises. Aren't you?"

"I am afraid that I am not desperately fond of them," said the rider, feeling more amused. "I have plenty of them in my profession."

"Ah yes, you are an officer." She looked at him more narrowly through the dusk; and he, at the same time, looked more narrowly at her. What she saw was a handsome young hussar captain—for in spite of the dusk she could catch the three stars glimmering on his collar; and what he saw was a young woman, short and plump, with fine black eyes, wavy black hair, and a brilliant, if somewhat coarse, complexion. She leant at the end of the bridge, with her back against the rail now, and she appeared quite open to further conversation. He had led a silent and a solitary life lately, and even this adventure was a little

change. Moreover, there was something about this lonely spot which seemed to create a sympathy between these two lonely people. For she seemed to be as lonely as he was; why else should she have come out here while the Tarajow bells were ringing this festive peal, and the church was crowded for the service of the *Zmartwychwstanie?* [1]

"So you find it more amusing to throw stones into the water than to go to church with the rest of the Tarajow people?" remarked the hussar, as he reined in his impatient horse. The yellow dog—more green than yellow by this time—seeing that his master was bent upon this foolish and unnecessary halt, sat down on the bank in shivering resignation, and faintly wagged his tail, as much as to say that he was able to resign himself with a cheerful spirit, if duty so demanded it.

"And you find it more amusing to ride about?" said the young woman, who all this time was gazing at him a great deal more narrowly than he was gazing at her. "Is this the way you intend to spend your Easter?"

"I have nowhere to go to at Easter," answered the rider, with a smile, and a sigh on the back of the smile.

"You have a brother you might go to," said the young woman.

[1] Resurrection.

The rider started and flushed. "How do you know that?" he asked quickly, perhaps a trifle proudly.

"Because I know who you are," was the answer. "You are Kazimir Bielinski."

"That is wonderfully well guessed. I am Kazimir Bielinski."

"It is not guessed; I recognised you."

"Have you ever seen me before?"

"Never; but I know you by a likeness;" and to herself the woman added, "he is stronger and taller, but it is the same face."

The hussar felt more amused than ever. "What else do you know about me?" he inquired.

"I know that you got a letter this morning."

"There is a wrong guess; I have not had a letter for a week."

"Well, you will get it to-night then; I forgot that the post takes three days for three miles."

"How do you happen to know this?"

"Because I posted the letter."

"You did!" The rider looked sorely puzzled. Most gladly would he have put to the black-haired woman the question, "Who the dickens are you?" only that it would have seemed to him rude. "I beg your pardon; but is the letter from you, then?"

"No; I don't know from whom the letter is; but it comes from Wowasulka."

Again the rider flushed, and bit his lip this time, and the young woman gazed at him very curiously through the dusk.

"I don't know of any one at Wowasulka who could write to me," reflected the rider,—"except Marcin." He did not notice that he had said it aloud until the woman's answer startled him.

"No, the letter is not from Marcin," she said, abruptly.

Certainly she was a very strange young woman, he considered; and before he had recovered from this fresh shock of surprise, the young woman proved herself to be stranger still.

"You have been here in garrison all winter," she observed, picking up a large stone from the bank and flinging it right into the centre of a pool.

"The regiment came to Poland last autumn," said Kazimir, more and more puzzled by her manner.

"And you have kept very clear of Wowasulka, have you not?" She flung a handful of gravel after the stone.

Was he to take offence, or was he to go on being amused at this strange frankness? Kazimir asked himself. He decided on the latter course.

"I have not been there lately," he answered, evasively. She shrugged her shoulders and laughed.

"You're not particularly fond of your brother, I

fancy? neither am I, for the matter of that—of one of your brothers, that is to say,—I can't bear men who move so quietly. Well, I should advise you to go home and read your letter. I daresay there's something about it in there."

"And you are sure it is a real letter,—not a myth or a hoax?"

"It may be a hoax; but I know it isn't a myth. They gave it me to post when I was up at the house yesterday with some medicine."

"There is nobody ill there?" asked Kazimir, quickly.

"The little girl is ill,—cutting her teeth, I heard."

"And you do not know from whom the letter is?"

"Not I; go home and see for yourself; the letter must be there by this time, unless the postman is lying drunk in a ditch, which he very often is, for two days at a time. That is your way, isn't it?" and she pointed back across the water. "Do you often ride this path?"

"Yes; it is my short cut to Tarajow."

"Good-night, then; perhaps I shall see you again,—either here or elsewhere. You were very civil to me, you know, about the splashing and the dog;" and the young woman looked at him approvingly. "You are just the sort of man of whom one would not mind asking a favour, if one needed it."

"Thank you," said Kazimir, laughing. "Good-night." And he turned his horse and rode at the ford

again, for he had no more thought of going to Tarajow that evening.

As he reached the further bank, he heard the woman's voice calling after him—

"You are wondering who I am, are you not? I am the apothecary's daughter. Good-night."

The apothecary's daughter! A far-off recollection grew alive in Kazimir's mind. He knew that there had been an apothecary's daughter, a pretty apothecary's daughter, or one at least whom Marcin had found pretty four years ago; and this apothecary's daughter certainly was pretty, even though she had lost her first short-lived freshness. But Kazimir did not speculate further on the subject just now, for his thoughts were all bent on the letter which awaited him at home. He started home at a much brisker pace than that at which he had come here, and, trotting along the pathway between the willows, he could still hear behind him the continued splash, splash, of the stones in the water; for the apothecary's daughter had apparently resumed her occupation on the bridge.

Kazimir's depression and loneliness had given way all at once to an excited curiosity. It was not far from four years now that he had left home last, and it was three years since any communication had passed between him and his brother. Not long after Lucyan's marriage, when the brothers had parted in coolness,

there arose a serious quarrel between them, the effects of which had lasted till now. The breach itself had come about in the following manner. Month after month slipped by since the wedding, and Kazimir heard no word further of the twelve thousand florins, which was to be the price of that paper signed at Verona on the same day as the Villafranca peace. At first this silence left him indifferent; but by degrees it began to surprise and alarm him. Attacked by the exhortations of the Auditor, he realised at last that those twelve thousand florins were the sum of his possessions. Urged on by the same indefatigable mentor, he wrote to Lucyan, and received a politely evasive assurance of payment to follow. The payment did not follow. Kazimir waited another month, and then, under the Auditor's spur, wrote again more urgently. After the lapse of a few weeks, he received one thousand florins in payment. Some time after that the one thousand florins were followed by a small riding-horse. "The season has been such an unfruitful one," wrote Lucyan, that ready money is out of the question, so I send you your second thousand in the shape of a horse."

It was a very pretty little horse, with a flowing mane and a long tail, but it was a great deal too small for Kazimir to ride, and he sold it next day for five hundred florins—the highest price he could get—to a

lady who was setting up a pony-carriage. This horse, and more particularly its stature, finally brought matters to a crisis. Under the good-humoured taunts of his comrades, and foremost of Lohonzy, who made a point of inquiring every day whether he expected any more ponies from Poland, Kazimir awoke to the fact that his younger brother was making a fool of him. His blood was up from that moment, and instead of a letter of thanks for the pretty horse, Lucyan received a somewhat violent epistle, in which Kazimir demanded point-blank to know what his brother's intentions were. "I might insist if I chose," he wrote, remembering that the transaction between them was to be, after all, but a matter of form,—"I might insist upon Wowasulka being sold and my portion being paid out, but I do not wish to push you to extremes." The violent epistle was answered by a cool one, in which, however, it appeared that the matter of form had not been a matter of form at all, but a matter of great reality; that Wowasulka belonged in fact, as well as on paper, to Lucyan, and to him alone. There followed a stormy correspondence, in which Kazimir found himself foiled and baffled at every point, and the upshot of which was that Lucyan offered his brother five thousand florins in place of twelve, declaring his utter inability to raise more off the estate. "This is

my last word," said the letter, "and all I can do for you. If you are not satisfied, your way is clear: go to law. There is the paper of our agreement to put up against me, so the chances are good on your side. In about four or five years' time you might hope for a decision, and perhaps you may then gain five hundred florins more than I now offer you. I daresay that you will be glad of this opportunity of being so speedily revenged upon me, and upon *her*."

Kazimir was pale with rage when he folded up this letter; and the Auditor, seeing the strange whiteness of his face, asked him what was wrong. Kazimir told him of his brother's proposal, and the Auditor chuckled and cheerfully rubbed his hands. "A fine case," he murmured—"a very pretty case indeed. Don't you think so?"

"I do not think so," said Kazimir.

"Why, of what are you afraid? He cannot deny the paper. Just leave the matter to me, and see if you don't get your rights."

"I do not intend to try," said Kazimir, tearing his brother's letter to shreds.

The Auditor very nearly rolled off his chair in surprise. "You are joking, Bielinski, are you not? Be so kind as to say that you are joking. Let me hear you say that again. What is it you do not intend to do?"

"I am not going to law," said Kazimir, doggedly.

The Auditor stormed, remonstrated, preached and threatened, all in vain; and finally left the room in a passion, loudly declaring that he washed his hands of this young scatterbrain now and for ever. And Kazimir, when the door had slammed shut and he was alone, threw himself on a seat, covering his face with his hands. Family pride was very strong in him, but family pride alone might not have sufficed to keep him to his determination. It was the last word of Lucyan's letter that had clenched it. The unbearable thought of being at enmity with *her*, of appearing perhaps to be striving for revenge on *her*.

He understood now, and saw distinctly that his brother had but used him as an instrument, and that he was a fool for his confidence and his trust; but just this thought of wounded pride made him seal his lips on the subject henceforth. If he had been a fool, he would at least bear the effects of his folly in silence. It is a great mistake to pitch one's standard of human nature too high—people disappoint you, by falling short of it; whereas if you can pitch it low, they surprise you by surpassing it. We have no right to expect that all men should be honourable, and all women true. Kazimir was only deservedly punished for his folly. Never from that day forth had he touched upon the subject, even to the Auditor; but

neither from that day had the Auditor been the same to him as in the former time.

The breach between the brothers had been complete thenceforward, and all communication ceased. Not many months after the wedding, Bogumil had succumbed to a second stroke of paralysis: of this Kazimir had been informed, and he had heard as well of the birth of a child. Marcin, he knew, had continued to live at Wowasulka; boarded, clothed, and fed by Lucyan, who never gave him any trouble about account-books or reckonings, but kindly kept all his money for him. Never, perhaps, had an arrangement existed which was so entirely satisfactory to both parties concerned. It was only in the past autumn that Kazimir found himself with his regiment transferred to Poland. He was within a few miles of home now; but he made no attempt at renewing broken ties. He heard his brother mentioned frequently, and mentioned always with respect, and a certain sort of admiration. "Are you the brother of Bielinski of Wowasulka?" he had frequently been asked. "A lucky man Bielinski; quite at the top of the tree; has just been chosen Marszalek; immense position, immense influence; enlarged his estate, improved it wonderfully; gives splendid entertainments; has a beautiful wife; the first man in the country now!" All this Kazimir heard, and wondered to hear. Once only in the course

of the last winter, when galloping down a snowy road, had he met his brother face to face. A sledge had passed him close, and in the occupant, though muffled in fur to his ears, he had recognised Lucyan. Their eyes had met for a moment, but both were going fast; and that look of mutual recognition had been no more than a flash. Once again after that, Kazimir had caught sight of the sledge, but at a distance. He could see that there was a lady in it, for he caught the flutter of a veil; and this time he had turned his horse and ridden straight away in an opposite direction, as though he were riding for his very life. He had become almost used to the thought that the breach was to be a lifelong breach; and yet, at the news that a letter from Wowasulka lay waiting for him at home, curiosity and excitement came to life at once.

By good luck the postman had not chosen this day for going to sleep in a ditch, so the letter really was waiting for him at home. It was in a writing quite unknown to him; a weak and meaningless writing, it struck him in the first moment—but in the next, he thought differently. The writing, from weak and meaningless, became all at once graceful and feminine; for he had opened the envelope, and the name signed at the bottom of the page was "Xenia." He trembled so at that sight that the paper shook in his hands. Wild possibilities rose up and tortured him, for he

could not imagine the reason of this letter. Perhaps she wanted his help. Lucyan had ill-used her, and she had fled from him. Kazimir's imagination was on fire in a moment, and burning so hotly, that his calmness was scarcely equal to the task of reading the page. Lucyan had not ill-used her, it seemed, nor had she fled from him. Kazimir had pitched his expectations a great deal too high. She began by calling him "My dear brother Kazimir," and she went on to say that he would, no doubt, be very much surprised to hear from her, but that she hoped, really hoped very much, that it would not be a disagreeable surprise. "We heard several months ago," the pretty smooth writing ran on, "that you had come to Poland, and we have been expecting every day that you would come and see us. It was very unkind of you to stay away, and I hope you will never do it again. You might have guessed that I wanted to see you after such a long time, and I have never yet shown you my little Wandusia. Every one says she will be just like me; I wonder whether you will find it so. I am afraid you have quite forgotten us all, and never care to think of me at all. If you want to show that it is not true, you must come and spend the Easter-week with us: I know that Lucyan is very anxious for it. I think that I shall bake a fresh *baba* for you, all by myself, to reward you if you come. Lucyan says,"—

but the last two words were stroked out, and a new line begun.

"Of course, if you are really not able to forget the quarrel with Lucyan, it would be better if you did not come; but it would make me very unhappy to think that I should be the cause. I am quite sure that you will never say a word about the disagreeable things that are past, but that you will come, as I ask you, to make our quiet family Easter more cheerful."

"Angel of goodness!" cried Kazimir, as he read; "she cannot bear to see the breach between us; she cannot rest without trying to turn enemies into friends."

He was deeply and strangely moved by this letter. His own emotion filled him with wondering surprise. It was four years nearly since he had seen her last, and he had struggled for calmness until he thought he had gained it. After the first agony of such a disappointment, there follows a period of dull suffering, less keen but more dreary; and on that again, there follows calmness, or what passes for calmness as long as it meets with no shock. Even a very small stone is enough to break the calmness of a pool of water. Xenia's letter might be a very small stone indeed, but it had ruffled the quiet of Kazimir's mind. It entangled him in doubts and questions. Should he go? Should he stay? Should he grasp the olive-branch

held out to him, or should he thrust it back? What! and with the olive-branch thrust back the delicate hand which held it out? Surely such a course would be brutal. However little he might wish for Lucyan's friendship, it would be wrong to deprive that angel of the reward of the good work which she had set herself to do.

Perhaps conscience whispered faintly, "Do not go; it is not safe;" but pride cried out louder, "Everything is safe to a strong man. What is there to fear? Because you loved her four years ago, you need not love her now." And there were many other things which stood up on this second side. The dreariness of the long winter, the loneliness of half an hour ago, the brightness of the prospect offered him, the Easter-bells still ringing in his ears; they all spoke for the second side,—and Kazimir decided to go.

CHAPTER III.

LUCYAN PLAYS HEARTS.

"Timeo Danaos, et dona ferentes"
—VIRGIL.

WHEN Kazimir started for Wowasulka on Easter-Monday morning, his sensations were varied and contradictory. He felt a little uneasy, more curious, and very generous. The nearer he drew to Wowasulka, the more did his own conduct strike him as truly magnanimous. He was going freely to forgive the brother who had so gravely offended him, and this merely because a pretty little childish note had asked him to do so. He hoped only that the quiet family Easter was not going to be combined with a solemn family reconciliation; he trusted that he was not going to be formally asked for his forgiveness, which he greatly preferred to give tacitly. The meeting would be a painful one to Xenia. For her sake he wished it over. Would she colour as vividly as she had coloured

that day on the eve of the wedding, when he had come upon the group in the forest? What would she be doing when first he should see her to-day? Perhaps he would not see her; for Kazimir just now remembered the words of the apothecary's daughter, and fell to drawing pictures in his mind of Xenia, as a pale and anxious mother, keeping watch by the side of her sick child.

He was on Wowasulka ground by this time, and curiously he looked about him. Surprise began to grow up in him at what he saw. Every spot that brought recognition brought also a feeling of strangeness. There were new roads where there had been none before; there were well-kept roads where there had been bad ones. What had been small and pinched looked large and well-to-do. These signs of an improved fortune showed more distinctly with every step towards the house. They culminated in Lucyan's garden; for here there burst upon Kazimir's sight a large and brilliant conservatory, flashing back the April sunshine from each of its polished panes, while the modest flower-beds of four years ago were replaced by elaborately planned borders, bright with purple and yellow crocuses; the stony and once bare slope, which swelled towards the forest, was now clothed with flowering shrubs, well tended, and massed with a care which betrayed a loving and masterly eye; while every rock,

tall or flat, sharp or round, wore a flowing and luxurious robe of green ivy.

In spite of the consciousness of his magnanimity, there fell upon Kazimir a strange trepidation as he dismounted at the door. Before he had left the saddle, a hum of voices struck on his ear; men's voices and women's voices, and laughter mingled with the clink of glasses and plates. The quiet family Easter did not appear to him as so very quiet after all.

The dining-room door stood open, and Kazimir found his way in unannounced. There were over fifteen people in the room, most of them gentlemen in dress-coats: there was a long table, literally loaded with dishes, groaning under the weight of hams and eggs, of cold sucking pigs and cakes; and round this table, some sitting, some standing, the company were variously grouped. Almost every gentleman was either raising a full liqueur-glass to his lips, or putting down an empty liqueur-glass on the table, or clinking his liqueur-glass against another liqueur-glass held towards him. Those who did not hold a glass, held an egg,—for Polish etiquette demands that, at the Easter *Sviezone*, every gentleman should drink a glass of *wódki* with the host, and crack a hard-boiled egg with the hostess. And this, at the present moment, every one was engaged in doing, amid much laughter and gaiety.

Kazimir saw none of this at all, or saw it but vaguely.

All that was distinct to him was Xenia, standing at the further end of the room with a red egg in her hand, which she laughingly held towards the gentleman before her. Her rich blue-silk dress trailed to the ground, heavy with lace and elaborate trimmings; gold bracelets flashed upon her wrists, and through her chestnut hair a blue ribbon wound in and out, to flutter at her neck.

This picture only did Kazimir see, as he paused in the doorway, not noticing even the hush in the hum of voices which greeted his appearance. But Xenia noticed the hush, and, turning her head, saw Kazimir. Instantly her raised hand was dropped, leaving the egg uncracked; and with a smile breaking over her face—but not the vivid blush of four years ago—she came towards him down the room.

"You have come, after all; I am so glad! How good of you! Then you got my letter. Lucyan said you would not come; but I knew you would." All this time the smile of welcome was on her face, and her hand was held towards him, waiting to be shaken, or perhaps kissed, according to Polish custom; though in his first bewilderment he did not see it. She raised the other again, laughing,—the one which held the egg. "You must crack an egg with me, you know; that is the first thing. We must crack an egg before we say another word. I have never cracked an egg

with you ; for you went away before Easter that time, you know."

The egg was cracked; and Kazimir, still rather dazed, found himself, in another minute, shaking hands with everybody around — with his brother Lucyan amongst others—being introduced to strange people, and reintroduced to former acquaintances.

"I do not know whether you remember my brother Kazimir," said Lucyan, leading him up to an elderly lady, whose gold-rimmed eye-glass gave him somehow a chill shock of recognition. That gold-rimmed eye-glass would always seem to be mixed up with the most miserable moment of his life.

"I remember your brother Kazimir very well," answered a cracked voice, at the sound of which a second chill shock touched Kazimir. "I remember him most remarkably well;" and the owner of the cracked voice and the gold-rimmed eye-glass gave a visible shudder, as if at some alarming recollection. "I saw him at the time of——"

"He has come back," said Lucyan, emphatically ; as emphatically as though the words were to convey a warning to the elderly lady. The elderly lady apparently understood the warning. With a visible effort she stretched out three frail fingers towards the returned brother, and with a visible effort she conjured up an hysterical smile to her face.

"Ah, well, so you have returned; it must be a great comfort to your excellent brother."

"I don't know," said Kazimir, somewhat staggered. Ever since his entrance the conversation and the laughter had been hushed; and at the moment when the elderly lady addressed him, a silence had fallen on the guests. Every liqueur-glass and every egg was arrested in the air; every fan stopped its rattling, and every face was turned towards this side of the room, as though to watch some interesting scene. The silence, the poised liqueur-glasses, the faces turned this way, were alike incomprehensible to Kazimir. What this interesting scene was, he alone of all the guests was unable to imagine; but with a vague and uneasy suspicion, he began to guess that he was the chief actor in that scene. Why was he made thus into the central point of the entertainment? Why had every one pressed his hand so warmly, and looked at him so benevolently? He had seen tears of emotion in a grey-haired gentleman's eyes; what could they mean?

"A great comfort," resumed the elderly lady, amidst the impressive silence,—"a very great comfort to your excellent brother, as well as to all your relations."

"I am sure I hope so," said Kazimir, laughing, in hope of throwing off this undefined solemnity which oppressed him; and he looked around him for a re-

sponse to his laughter—but no response came. He met the same looks as before,—as benevolent as before, and as kind,—but to his laughter there was no answer except gravity. The occasion was evidently considered to be far above laughter. He looked from one face to the other, and his own laugh died out; he looked at the grey-haired gentleman last, and saw that the tears of emotion which he had seen shining were prepared to fall in a minute more.

"Four years is a long time,—a very long time indeed," the cracked voice was saying; and the tone seemed to convey a sort of reproach to him for the length of time,—a rebuke for the scale on which it had pleased him to model these four years.

"Yes; the regiment has had plenty of changes since then," said Kazimir, not daring to laugh again, or even to smile, but trying nevertheless to talk lightly. "Italy first, then Vienna, then——"

The elderly lady moved up her two hands quickly, and shut both her eyes. "We need not talk of *that*," she exclaimed, with a nervous shudder, as though the subject were too painful to be touched upon. "We are not pressing to know where you have been, or what you may have been doing, these four years. Let bygones be bygones."

"By all means," broke in Lucyan's voice at this

juncture; "but we must hear of Kazimir's adventures another time."

The elderly lady dropped her hands, opened her eyes, and shook her head at the speaker, with a sort of tender reproof. "Don't let your generosity run away with you," that look and that shake of the head seemed to say; "it is better that he should see things as they are."

Once more the cracked voice was raised: "Yes; ah, well, let bygones be bygones; many a fresh leaf is turned over at Easter-time. We have every—hope;" she hesitated before the word "hope," as though the expression were almost too strong to be candidly used; "every—hope for favourable changes, now that you have come back." The "favourable changes" were unmistakably the climax of the speech. Again the three frail fingers were stretched towards him, and again the hysterical smile was conjured up to beam upon him.

But Kazimir did not take the fingers this time, for the truth had flashed upon him. He had wondered what was the part he was supposed to be playing, now he wondered no longer: he saw that his part was that of the prodigal son. The benevolence and the solemn hush, and even the emotional tears were fully explained now. They meant it well by him; for

though he had kept away so long from the family roof, and though his past was too painful a subject to be publicly mentioned, and though he had wallowed in the mire of vice for four years past, they had all opened their arms to receive him now. They had not indeed put a gold ring on his finger; they had not offered him gold in that or in any other shape; but they had bidden the guests, and decked their table, and killed the fatted calf, to take from his mouth the taste of the unclean husks; for it was Easter-time, and the sun was shining brightly outside, and mankind was at peace, one with the other; and he was to be forgiven for everything that he had not done.

The first wild impulse which possessed him was to spoil the end of the parable by turning where he stood, and declaring into the very faces of the guests that he would have none of the fatted calf, for that he did not repent his ways. He who had come here to forgive, was he to stand thus meekly and be forgiven?

It was not to be borne; the wild fierce words of denial were all but bursting from his lips, when a soft hand was laid on his arm, and a soft voice whispered:

"You are tired with your ride, are you not? And you have eaten nothing; will you have veal-pie or ham?"

Fortunately for Kazimir's peace of mind, he had not perceived the sign made by the husband, and obeyed

by the wife. In that touch on his arm, and that whisper beside him, he saw nothing but a spontaneous impulse of most charming hospitality; it fell like oil upon the waters of his wrath.

"Ham, if you please," came quite meekly from his lips, instead of the fierce words of denial which had been burning there in the same minute; and the tamed prodigal allowed himself to be led to the table —to a further end where there were no guests lingering—and looked on submissively while his hostess helped him to a great deal more ham than he could possibly eat.

The worst moment for Kazimir was now over; but the feeling of the prodigal left its shadow upon him. He was always finding himself in the best place—by Xenia, of course—and always getting helped to the best bits,—at neither of which favours it was possible to take offence. Everything which he ate, whether it was sweet, sour, or peppered, tasted to him like fatted calf; and every guest wore the exact expression which he had always imagined to have been worn by the friends of the prodigal's father, who were called together to rejoice with him, because he that was lost had been found again. Hour after hour of the forenoon passed; the first guests left to make another station in their Easter-pilgrimage round the country, and new guests arrived, fresh from their last station.

And each guest, whether arriving or departing, whether young or old, whether man or woman, seemed equally determined to forgive him for some vague, unexplained, undefined, yet grievous harm that he had done; and all looked at Kazimir with the same eyes, and seemed only to stop short of patting him on the back, and saying heartily, "Cheer up! You are to have another chance of regeneration!" Even the sucking-pigs on the table, with the juicy lemon between their teeth, seemed to grin at him forgivingly each time he passed: the *baba*, decking the board like miniature hay-stacks, squinted and winked at him with well-meaning raisin-eyes, as much as to say, that though they knew all about it, they did not mean to rake up old wrongs; for that it was Easter-time, and many a new leaf was to be turned over now.

Fifty times did Kazimir repent having come here to walk blindfolded into this benevolent trap, and fifty times was he mollified by a word or a look of his hostess into repenting his repentance. If he did not stand up and deny it all, so he told himself, it was only for the sake of not annoying Xenia. It did not occur to him, that even were he to do so, he would not be believed; that he would be regarded simply as an unrepentant prodigal instead of a repentant one. For he forgot that his brother was the rich Bielinski and he the poor Bielinski; that Lucyan was the chief

personage and Marszalek of the country, while he was a penniless hussar, and that therefore his brother would be right and he would be wrong. No reason as logical as this induced Kazimir to hold his tongue; he was silent only from the fear of seeing a cloud rise to that pearly-white brow. What was irritating in the others was soothing in her. There was no exception to be made to her manner as hostess. That shrinking shyness, those childishly appealing looks which Kazimir had known so well, were gone now, and replaced by a greater assurance of mien, by a fuller gaze and a more conscious gait. The quick blushes of seventeen, and that bashful lowering of long lashes, were gone too. Perhaps, had Kazimir been calmer, he might have missed them; but he was far from calm. He had come here in some curiosity, wondering whether he were cured or not; and the first glance of her eyes gave him his answer; the first touch of her hand told him that he was not cured—that four years had done nothing to heal the old wound.

She had changed, it is true; not palpably, nor distinctly, nor in any way which could be put into words, —and yet she had changed; but it was a change which only made her more beautiful. She had matured and developed; what had been promise at seventeen, was fulfilment at twenty-one; what had then been in bud was now in flower. And who

does not prefer the flower to the bud, even though the dew may be a little brushed from off the perfect blossom?

Kazimir had never seen her so beautiful, nor had he ever seen her beauty set off to such advantage by dress. The rich silk, and creamy laces, and twinkling gold of her ornaments, gave to the young matron a brilliant frame which the young girl had never had.

How it came about that Kazimir found himself constantly at Xenia's side, he took no trouble to analyse. He saw none of the manœuvres, and signals, and glances by which Lucyan, from the other end of the room, directed his wife's movements. It was from Xenia that he got all the news of the family. Where was Marcin? Oh, Marcin always kept out of the way of visitors; he was in his room, no doubt, possibly in his bed; he seldom took the trouble of dressing himself completely, for he had got so strange and limp and dreamy these last years. And aunt Robertine? Yes, aunt Robertine lived with them also; but she always went away for a few days at Christmas and Easter-time, so as to avoid any family gathering; she found the place too cheerful at such times, "and she finds that I am not grave enough," added Xenia, simply; "she says that I am too light for her taste. But I shall be so glad when she comes back, for she takes charge of the keys and everything."

"And Vizia, what had become of her? Had she married?" inquired Kizimir.

"Married? Oh no," said Xenia, with a little laugh; "Vizia says she will never marry, and I suppose she will not; she is not at all pretty, you know. Everybody wishes so that she would not go on as she is doing."

"Has she been doing anything very dreadful?" asked Kazimir, wondering whether the prodigal son had found a fellow-sinner in a prodigal daughter.

"Well, it is rather dreadful," said Xenia, seriously. "She insists on living quite alone at Lodniki, and managing the farm by herself. She says she does not need any protection; but she is not so old after all, just twenty-six now, and everybody was so dreadfully shocked. We wanted her to sell the place and live with us, but she would not. Lucyan says that he cannot bear strong-minded women; I don't think any men do, do they?"

Kazimir answered that of course no man ever did, and inquired, for civility's sake, how Vizia prospered with her farm.

"Not very well, I think," said Xenia. "I don't understand about that sort of thing at all, but Lucyan says she is so obstinate, and will not take any advice, and my uncle left a great many debts to the Jews. Lucyan says that if it had not been for the railway she would have been forced to sell Lodniki."

Kazimir had heard the railway much spoken of this winter; its speedy construction was a common topic of conversation now. "So the railway is really going to be built, is it? What a pity your poor uncle did not live to see his dream fulfilled!"

"Yes; and they have put up white posts in a row to show where they mean to build it; but I think they have not quite made up their minds yet. It is meant to go all through the Lodniki ground; and Vizia looks at the white posts every morning from the window, and calls them *her* white posts, for she says they will make her rich. I told her that I could not bear having the noise and the smoke so close to the house. I am sure it would give me a headache; but Vizia is so strong, she never has headaches."

"And is she spending Easter all alone at Lodniki?"

Xenia looked at him in surprise. "Oh no, she is here in the house; she came over as soon as she heard that Wandusia was ill,—did not I tell you that she was cutting her teeth? Vizia is taking care of her now."

"To be sure." The sick child had entirely vanished from Kazimir's memory, and recurred to it only at this moment; and now only he noticed that the pictures he had drawn of the pale and anxious mother had been replaced by a brighter and certainly more beautiful reality.

"Lucyan won't let me sit beside Wandusia for long," went on Xenia, with a charming pout; "he says it makes me look pale. My nerves are rather weak, you know. I could not bear to look on when they lanced Wandusia's gums—I ran away out of the room, and stopped my ears; but Vizia has such strong nerves, she stayed in the room and she held Wandusia the whole time, although the poor darling screamed fearfully. I don't understand how one can do that when one has any feeling. Vizia never had much feeling in that way. I remember long ago, when we were children, we once found a nest full of young birds on the ground, which had been blown off a high tree in the storm. One of them was quite dead, and the others were all bleeding and crushed. Vizia wanted to have them all killed at once—she said it would put them out of pain; but I cried and begged so hard that I was allowed to take them home."

"And did they get quite tame?" asked Kazimir.

"Well," said Xenia, candidly, "they had not time, you know, because I forgot to feed them, and they died a few days after. But I cried dreadfully about it," she added in apology; and certainly those tears must have quite made up to the little birds for their untimely end.

While Xenia conversed with her brother-in-law after this sisterly fashion, she had many times been

interrupted by guests departing, whom she had to escort to the door, or by guests arriving, whom she had to receive. Gradually the stacks of *baba* began to be levelled, and gradually the egg-pyramids, which had at first appeared unconquerable, commenced to dwindle and shrink; the hams were beginning to show their bones, while of the sucking-pigs there remained little more than their grin.

Nevertheless, five o'clock in the afternoon found the Wowasulka dining-room still full. No house was more assailed by Easter visitors than this of the new-made Marszalek. A swarm of black-coated courtiers hovered perpetually round his person. His opinion was asked, his views were agreed to, the arrangement of his flower-garden was admired. What were his opinions of the European peace? What did he think of the chances of this year's crops? What was the last report of the railway company? Was the Lodniki line really to carry the day, or was the Bruszów line still on the *tapis?* And then, as to this fever in Tarajow, were the deaths really as numerous as reported? A string of questions, as long as this and longer, was being continually put to Lucyan by older men and more experienced men than himself, who, one and all, listened to his answers with at least outward respect.

Lucyan answered the whole string of questions with

a patience which was most admirable. His opinion of the European peace was good, and of the crops bad. He really knew very little about the railway company; but the white posts were put up at Lodniki, which any one could see for himself. The fever, he believed, was very strong at Tarajow—there were funerals daily—and it was a great bore certainly, coming just at this time; for ever so many workmen had fallen off in consequence, and, as a result, the spring work suffered.

"I am thankful to say that I have my oats all in the ground," said young Tiburtio, who was among the guests, and who for the last two years had been a married man.

"There used never to be fevers in my day," remarked a certain choleric old gentleman, who had grown more choleric as well as older in these last four years. "It all comes from the degeneracy of the times."

"But there used to be cholera and pest to make up for it," suggested Lucyan; and the guests, having had a good deal of *wódki* by this time, laughed aloud at the ready answer of the Marszalek.

Another gentleman, who rolled his eyes ferociously, observed that no man present had outlived more fevers than he had.

But the topic was not a festive topic, and it found

no favour; it was dropped for more congenial subjects, while host and hostess pressed their guests to finish up the cheerful day by a cheerful evening. The mangled sucking-pigs had been replaced by whole ones; fresh stacks were beginning to rise down the length of the long table; a musical young gentleman, who had recently lost his voice, was just regretting his inability to favour the company with a song, which no one had asked for, when again the sound of carriage-wheels swept up to the door.

Xenia rose instinctively to receive this new guest; but Lucyan, turning from the window, made her a sign to sit still. "It is only the doctor to see after Wandusia," he whispered, as he passed her.

Every one saw the doctor leave his carriage, and every one heard the doctor's steps going along the passage, and nobody thought anything further of it. The empty carriage began to drive slowly a little bit up the road, and then down again. The guests looked out of the window, criticised the horses, remarked that they were ill-matched, and then, growing tired of the amusement, gave up the contemplation of the doctor's equipage. Ten minutes later, looking out again, they were surprised to see the carriage still standing and still empty. The doctor was staying a long time in the house, thought the guests, as they waited for the return of their host. They waited full

ten minutes longer; they began to feel curious first then perhaps faintly uneasy. The doctor's well-known face had been the first check upon the festive spirit of the day; and somehow, as minute after minute passed, people's eyes began to turn impatiently towards the door, while unconsciously conversation flagged and stood still. There had been steps more than once in the passage, hurried steps passing; and once a further door had opened, and the voice of a wailing child reached the listening ears. Then there was a pause, and then, to everybody's relief, the door opened.

"You must not go home without a glass of *wódki*, doctor," Lucyan was saying, as he ushered the doctor in.

The doctor was an old man, and rather short-sighted. He came a step into the room, then, peering around him, he stood still and hesitated.

"Oh," he said, with a slight start, "you have guests, I see; rather unfortunate."

"Come, that is polite to us," cried one of the guests. They were all well acquainted with the doctor. "Let us break an egg, doctor, I say."

But the doctor still stood and hesitated.

"I am scarcely justified in intruding, although they say that doctors carry no infection."

"And teething is not infectious," added Lucyan, with a laugh. But this time the Marszalek's joke

was not echoed, and Lucyan himself was scanning the doctor's face very intently.

"Teething is not infectious," repeated the doctor, slowly, while the guests looked at each other, with the cold chill of apprehension which had touched their hearts reflected on their faces. The hostess herself, with pale cheeks and startled eyes, was gazing from her husband's face to that of the doctor, and back again at her husband.

Who it was that first pronounced the dreaded word no one knew; but before another minute had passed, the truth was flying round the room from mouth to mouth. Every one whispered the word "fever" to his neighbour, and, instinctively, every person who was sitting rose, and every person who held a glass or a plate put it hastily down.

The host, looking rather pale, was ushering the doctor out, and returned to receive the hasty shakes of the hand and hurried words of condolence of his departing guests. There was no possibility of veiling the truth by any roundabout phrases, for the plain word had been spoken, and the panic-stricken guests fled like sheep.

In twenty minutes more the house was deserted, and nothing but the wrecks of *baba* and the skeletons of hams remained to tell of the joyful assembly there had been.

"And you," asked Lucyan, turning from the window towards Kazimir, when the last of the carriages had driven off, "of course you are going to fly? Do you want your horse led round?"

"No," said Kazimir. "Since I am here I shall stay."

CHAPTER IV.

LUCYAN PLAYS DIAMONDS.

"By merit raised
To that bad eminence."
—*Paradise Lost.*

Of course Lucyan had motives. It was not merely because the sun was shining brightly outside, and because the Easter lamb had bleated of Easter peace over the green meadows, and the birds were chanting their paschal *Halleluiah* overhead, that he had decked his table and called together the guests to rejoice with him over the brother who had been lost and was found again. He was not a man to do anything without motives; and he had plenty of motives this time, general as well as particular. The truest and warmest hearted man that ever lived could not have been more anxious than was Lucyan at this moment to fill up the breach of the last four years. The reasons which made this desirable were various. To consider it merely from the ornamental point of view, it

looked well to have a handsome hussar brother about the house. His uniform and moustache, his spurs and his riding-cane, would all display themselves to the general advantage and interest of the Marszalek's household. And not only his spurs and his moustache,—for Lucyan did full justice to his brother's happy qualities of mind and manner. "Poor Kazio! he is a brilliant butterfly," Lucyan would say, with a mixture of pity and envy. He not only admitted the brilliancy of the butterfly, he insisted on it, and so the butterfly-nature became established with all the more certainty. The Marszalek liked to hear people say that he had the finest carriage, the best roses, the prettiest wife in all the neighbourhood,—so why not also the handsomest brother?

But it was not merely as an ornament that Lucyan desired his brother's presence. Kazimir might prove useful as well as ornamental. An estrangement between two brothers always has something suspicious about it; and Lucyan, who in his elevated position felt himself and his actions illuminated to some extent by the fierce light which beats on thrones, could not afford to do anything which might appear suspicious. It was much safer to be on good terms with Kazimir, instead of on bad. As long as Kazimir's regiment was stationed in Tyrol or Vienna, the breach could do no harm, because to the eyes of the neigh-

bourhood it remained invisible; but from the moment that the hussars had been transferred to within a few miles of Tarajow, Lucyan's thoughts had tended to reconciliation. The breach must, of necessity, become visible now. A breach presupposes a quarrel; and there never fail inquiring spirits who are anxious to know what the quarrel has been about, and on which side the fault lies.

Lucyan foresaw all this, and ruminated over it. He was in general given to deeper and more anxious reflections now than four years ago. Four years had made changes in him as well as in his wife. He looked older, thinner, more cautious, and more watchful. His pale forehead had a line across it already, though he was but twenty-eight. The higher a man climbs, the more precarious does his footing become, and the more destructive must prove a fall. Lucyan had reached a height which, from its very elevation, was slippery; he knew that he must look carefully to every one of his steps, especially if he wanted to reach the yet greater heights which were the pinnacles of his ambition. His ambition and his love of money had made him into what he was now; both had been fed by success till each hungered for more, and each trembled at the thought of losing what it already held.

When first Lucyan heard of the hussars' arrival, he

felt convinced that Kazimir would be at Wowasulka before a week was out. But that week passed, and many others, and Kazimir did not appear. Lucyan was thrown out of his reckonings; he was not able to imagine what amusement or what interest could induce his brother to keep up a quarrel from which there was no further advantage to be gained. As the winter slowly passed, and Kazimir kept his distance, Lucyan began to confess to himself that he had, after all, somewhat mistaken his brother's character. Because he knew Kazimir to be impulsive and thoughtless, he had believed that he would be fickle in his resolutions, and shallow, however passionate, in his hate as well as in his love. Upon such obstinacy he had not counted. He now recognised that the first step would have to come from his side. Still he hesitated,—not from any feeling of pride, but from a lack of means. Then a bright thought, worthy of his genius, struck him. If Kazimir had been so obstinate in his enmity, might he not have been equally tenacious in his love? It was a chance, at any rate; and upon that chance he had thrown out a card—he had played his Queen of Hearts. Rather to his own surprise, the card had taken the trick; for almost as soon as Kazimir, coming into Xenia's presence, had recognised that his wound was not healed, Lucyan had perceived the same. He had perceived it with a

shrug and a smile, such as men give in pity at another man's folly. "To be sure he has not seen her for four years," reasoned Lucyan, perhaps in explanation of the folly. But the folly itself would fit most conveniently into his plans. Kazimir had lost his buoyancy and his lightness, he was a graver and a wiser man; but for all that he was not yet cured of his belief in human nature,—and Lucyan rejoiced to see it.

"So you got on well with Kazimir," he said to his wife on that Easter-Monday evening, after all the terrified guests had fled from the house, and calmness had in some degree been established among the no less terrified servants. Xenia herself had spent the evening in tears, and it was from the depth of a wet pocket-handkerchief that she answered her husband's question.

"With Kazimir? oh yes; but do you really think, Lucyan, that Wandusia will die?"

"It is of so much use asking my opinion, is it not? I wish you would stop crying, Xenia; it will do Wandusia no good, and it will only spoil your eyes;" and Lucyan looked towards his wife with evident anxiety, for it would not suit his plans at all if her eyes were spoiled.

She dried her eyes at once, though she still shook with hysterical sobs.

"I do not wish you to dwell on that subject," said

Lucyan. "I want to know what passed between you and Kazimir. There was a little flirtation, was there not?"

"Oh, Lucyan!" She gazed at him with frightened eyes, quite unable to understand from his tone whether she were going to be scolded or praised. "Oh, Lucyan!" was the safest thing to say; it covered all contingencies, and she said it instinctively.

His wife's face at this moment seemed to amuse Lucyan beyond all measure; he stood looking at it and laughing, while she trembled in fear of his next words.

"Do not look so scared, Xenia," he said, still laughing. "I wanted only to know whether you and Kazimir were really getting on as well together as from the other end of the room you seemed to be. Oh, you need not drop your eyes; I know the length of your lashes by heart. There is no harm, you know, child; is he not your brother-in-law?"

"Yes, of course," said Xenia, somewhat relieved.

"Well, he does not seem to think that you have become much uglier in these four years, does he?"

"No," said Xenia, colouring, but with the suspicion of a smile peeping out at the corners of her mouth. After all, it *was* very pleasant to find that she had not lost her looks in four years, and that Kazimir saw it.

"He would not mind doing you any little service, for instance?" suggested Lucyan.

"I suppose not," said Xenia, utterly unable to follow her husband's drift.

"Or to give you a thing if you asked for it, would he?"

"I suppose not," repeated Xenia, more and more bewildered. "Am I to ask him for anything?"

"Not just at present; but it may come. Have you ever heard of the story of the monkey who wanted the hot chestnuts out of the ashes, Xenia?"

"Yes; at least I think so."

Lucyan was standing beside his wife's chair. He took up the hand which lay on her lap, and contemplated it with the eye of a satisfied critic. It was a hand perfect both in colour and shape; so small, so narrow, so delicate, so white a hand would have been hard to match even in Poland, where all women have comparatively beautiful hands. Lucyan looked it all over, from the tiny wrist to the rosy nails; and Xenia sat quite passive, gazing alternately at her husband and at her beautiful hand. Of course she knew that her hand was beautiful, and she supposed that her husband was admiring it, but she wondered why he was admiring it just now. Neither was it much enlightenment to her when in the next moment he said, "It would make a pretty little cat's-paw;" and he

stroked it gently, as if afraid of breaking so frail a thing. "And it is going to fetch out the hot chestnuts so neatly from the ashes. Are you fond of chestnuts, Xenia?"

"Yes, rather; I like them with salt," answered the puzzled Xenia, vaguely aware that the hot chestnuts were not really hot chestnuts. Lucyan laughed again, and she started and shrank back, as she always did at the sound of his laugh.

"Then you will not mind burning your fingers a little to get them," said Lucyan, looking on in exquisite enjoyment at his wife's bewilderment. "I suppose a diamond bracelet would quite make up for burnt fingers, would it not, Xenia?"

"A diamond bracelet!" Xenia's eyes lit up, as she stared at her husband. "Are you going to give me a diamond bracelet, Lucyan?" she asked, breathlessly.

"I was thinking of it," said Lucyan, still softly stroking the hand he held. "Diamonds would look well, would they not, upon this little cat's-paw,—upon this little wrist, I mean? If you promise to do as you are told, and to make yourself useful, I shall write to Lwów about the bracelet."

"Will there be as many diamonds as in Madame Murawska's?" asked Xenia, with wide eyes.

"There will be more," said Lucyan.

The wide eyes flashed for joy. "What am I to do, Lucyan? Can I not do it at once?"

"No, not at once; it is not time yet. See only that Kazimir should not feel neglected this week. Keep him in good-humour; and mind, you are not to sit up at night in the nursery—leave that to stronger people."

Xenia's tears burst out afresh. "Poor Wandusia! don't you think she will get well, Lucyan? Why will you not let me nurse her?"

"I have told you why; because the fever is infectious, and you might catch it."

"I want to catch it; I want to die if she dies," sobbed Xenia, hysterically.

"But you do not want to lose your complexion, I suppose," suggested Lucyan; "and no woman ever recovers her complexion after this fever. They remain sallow for life."

The prospect of remaining sallow for life was far more terrifying than the prospect of death. Xenia began to consider the question seriously.

"You know it would not do if you lost your complexion," said Lucyan.

"No, of course it would not do," admitted Xenia, through her tears; but then if Vizia nurses her——"

"Vizia has no complexion to lose."

"To be sure." Xenia recognised the truth of that.

"Poor Vizia! she really has no complexion to lose."

The complexion had turned the scale; and this for the present was all that Lucyan could do towards the furtherance of the more particular motive which had induced him to hold out the hand of reconciliation to Kazimir. This was not the time to act further upon that motive; everything had to give way to the unwelcome guest which had come upon them unawares. A horrid uneasiness prevailed over the household. Every morning they awoke, wondering whether they were still safe from the fever, and curious to know whether no one had sickened in the night. At every headache they thought of fever; if their appetites failed them, they were certain it was the fever. They watched each other, and shunned each other with a morbid caution. Even the inquiries which the neighbours sent made them feel more like a plague-stricken household; for every servant of every neighbour had been threatened with dismissal, should he venture to cross the threshold of the infected house; so the inquiries were shouted down from the seat of a vehicle, which, halting at a safe distance, made off again as soon as the answer was shouted back. The answers thus shouted back varied but slightly: "A little better—anxious night—fever increased—no change."

By the Thursday of that week, little Wandusia was

at the height of the fever, while two fresh cases had broken out; the cook and the garden-boy had taken it. As yet no other member of the family was touched.

Kazimir did not know whether to be glad or sorry for having remained at Wowasulka. To have gone would have appeared to him like a cowardly abandoning of them all in their trouble, and yet to stay seemed like heightening the general confusion. The confusion was yet more heightened when, on Wednesday, Mademoiselle Robertine suddenly appeared upon the scene, in all the splendid gloom of black garments and black veils, bringing with her a black hand-bag, and looking more unfathomable than ever as she stepped out of a conveyance which seemed to have become infected with her own blackness. From the Easter rejoicings she had fled, but the news of the fever brought her back to the spot with a gloomy alacrity. To her unspeakable surprise she found that she was not wanted; for the black garments frightened Wandusia into a fit; and, excluded from the room, Robertine was forced to content herself with concocting for the invalid mysterious mixtures, after recipes which she kept under lock and key.

As for the second elderly aunt, Madame Torska, she remained in the house; but partly from fear of the fever, and partly from fear of the dangerous brother, in whose presence she never could feel quite easy, she

shut herself up strictly in her room, and there remained invisible. Lucyan likewise was generally invisible, excusing himself on the plea of business; and thus it came about that the two unoccupied inmates of the house—for Marcin seldom appeared—were thrown into frequent contact. Many a time did Kazimir, coming down the passage, hear whispered voices at the other end, and catch sight of a slender figure, in a pale-blue dressing-gown, over which streamed chestnut hair, standing beside the sick-room door, and holding a tearful parley through the chink. On these occasions, Xenia was usually bearing in her hands a glass or a plate with some delicacy, which, as she expressed herself, she had prepared with her own fingers for her sick darling,—but which, as Vizia repeatedly explained, could not avoid being the sick darling's certain death. "A little slice of cake could not hurt her,—she is so fond of cake, poor pet!" or, "a drop of sweet wine would be sure to do her good;" thus Xenia was usually parleying when Kazimir came down the passage.

"Please take her away," Vizia would then say, through the chink, to Kazimir; and then Kazimir would take her away, and she, faintly protesting, would allow herself to be led into another room, and consoled by her brother-in-law. Every day this scene took place, with small variations. Every evening, Xenia, dressed in the same blue dressing-gown, and

with her hair hanging down her back, asked Lucyan, "May I sit up with Wandusia?" And every evening Lucyan answered, "No, you may not;" after which Xenia sobbed and protested; after which every one persuaded her that her wish was foolish; after which, finally, Xenia resigned herself to go to sleep in her own bed, and getting up next morning, fresh and blooming, began again to spend her time as before, between standing and sighing outside the nursery-door, and then taking disinfectants for the fever,—alternately shedding tears and bathing her eyes in rose-water. She said prayers for her child upon a mother-of-pearl rosary, and wore a silver medal upon a blue ribbon round her neck as preservative against the fever.

Matters were still at this stage, when Saturday, and the end of Kazimir's short leave, came. He returned to his station and to his work with a somewhat heavier heart than that with which he had left it. Three days passed, and he had had no news from Wowasulka. On Tuesday afternoon, feeling uneasy at this silence, he started to make inquiries.

CHAPTER V.

A SMALL CARD.

"Infandum, regina, jubes renovare dolorem."
—VIRGIL.

THE afternoon was cloudless, the sky blindingly blue, the air perfumed with violets. In Lucyan's garden the violets were flowering in profusion. A perfect wave of violet-scent swept towards Kazimir as he drew close to the house. The gardener was busy gathering the flowers which grew thickly between the rocks and rhododendrons at the far end of the garden. Lucyan, whose masterful genius loved perfection in details, had covered every bare patch in the rockery with violet plants; for the rockery was his proudest creation. "Have you seen my twins?" he had one day startled Kazimir by asking; and then, with a laugh at his brother's inquiring stare, he had pointed to a pair of tall rocks which stood side by side on the slope, far overtopping their scattered fellows. "My twins are fine specimens, are they not?" Lucyan added, with all the pride of a newly made father.

It was beside Lucyan's twins that Kazimir now caught sight of a basket, full to overflowing with purple heads; he vaguely wondered for what so many violets could be wanted. As he turned from the garden to the house a chill of fear touched him,—for he saw shuttered windows; and in the doorway Lucyan was standing with a tall hat in his hand; and as Kazimir got nearer, he saw that there was black crape round the hat.

Wandusia had died on Sunday, the day after Kazimir left the house. In the confusion no one had thought of writing to him; but he had come in time for the funeral,—for the priest was to be here almost immediately. And then a white hand was laid on Kazimir's arm, and a quivering voice whispered, "Shall I show her to you? you have never seen her, and she looks so pretty."

Kazimir following his beautiful, black-robed guide, found himself standing in a darkened room, where wax-candles where flickering around a little bed, and where the violet-scent made the air almost too sickly to be sweet. Aunt Robertine was there, looking more in place than Kazimir had ever seen her look before; and Vizia was there, haggard with long watching, and red-eyed with weeping—for Vizia had not had time to use rose-water.

"Is she not lovely?" whispered the voice beside

him; and Kazimir, gazing down, started at the sight of that little face, pillowed on lace and framed in blooming violets. He had never seen it before, and yet it was so familiar. The short chestnut curls, the transparent pearly tint of skin, the long curling lashes, the tiny rosebud mouth, they were all as familiar to him as things that he knew well; and as things that he knew well too, there struck upon him that spotless innocence of childhood, that heavenly purity of smile, stamped upon the two-year-old features, as things that he knew well — or rather that he had known well—not so long ago, four years at most. He did not seem to know them so well now. The little Wandusia on the bed seemed almost more like the Xenia of four years ago than the beautiful woman that stood beside him in this moment.

"Is she not lovely?" whispered Xenia beside him.

"Take care," said Lucyan's voice sharply,—"the wreath, you will crush it;" for Kazimir had bent to kiss the little face on the pillow.

The blood seemed to rush from his heart to his head, as his lips touched the small cold cheek. With one leap of memory he was borne back to a night years ago, when he had touched a cheek as fair as that, but less cold; and when he had looked into eyes that were veiled by just such soft lashes as these. He had kissed Xenia but that once in his life, and in

this moment it seemed to him almost as though he were kissing her for the second time. Why was it that there flashed through his mind a feeling of something that was lost; something that had been and was no more; something that he must mourn for as past?

He awoke from a dream to the sound of her voice, and to the consciousness that Lucyan was putting to rights again the violet wreaths which he had displaced. Would he come into the next room now? the whisper asked; she wanted to show him something else.

He went into the next room; and in the next room there was a different sight to see.

"Are they not lovely?" asked Xenia, drying her eyes, as she opened a morocco case. "I have never had a diamond bracelet yet, and they came just to-day. Is it not kind of Lucyan?"

Kazimir found it very kind of Lucyan, and very thoughtful; it was only an additional proof of how thoroughly Lucyan understood women. He himself would never have guessed that diamonds were such a powerful means of drying tears. He ruminated upon the question for the next hour; he reflected upon it still as he followed the funeral towards Tarajow. Lucyan and he alone followed, for Marcin, at the last moment, was not to be moved from the house. Kazi-

mir being sent to hurry him, found his brother seated in his dressing-gown, by the window, lazily watching the little coffin as it was lifted into the carriage.

"Marcin! what are you thinking of?" Kazimir exclaimed. "We are all waiting for you."

"I will tell you what I was thinking of," answered Marcin, leaning back. "I was thinking what a comfortable thing it must be to be a corpse; it is such a blessing to think that one will have to take no trouble about one's own funeral."

"Are you ill, Marcin?" asked Kazimir, somewhat startled by his brother's look.

Marcin gazed at him with a puzzled air. "I've got lead in my arms and legs, and wheels in my head, but I am quite well otherwise."

This was all the account Marcin could give of himself, and the mourning-carriage had started without him. There were many mourning-carriages following the funeral, and many more violet-wreaths sent to be laid on the small coffin. At the entrance of the wooden church outside Tarajow, there stood a crowd of gaping peasants, dressed in their best, for it was the Russian Easter now. A peasant-bride stood there with a thick round wreath of periwinkles perched on the crown of her head; she had walked ten miles to be married, but she could not be married that day, they told her, for the Marszalek's child had to be buried.

There was not a stone in the entire construction of the church: the square enclosure in which it stood, the four low turrets at the four corners of the enclosure, the church itself with its round-roofed minaret-shaped domes, was framed entirely and solely of deep-brown wood. The wooden walls were cut at rare intervals by tiny square windows; in consequence of this the church was dark; and in consequence of the darkness there were, on this occasion, a profusion of candles lit. Not only were there candles flaming on the altar and round the coffin, but in order to give additional pomp to the ceremony, and be all the more sure of pleasing the Marszalek, there were candles distributed throughout the length and breadth of the congregation. A Polish peasant is never so happy as when he is holding a burning candle; but perhaps because it was Easter-week, and the greater part of the congregation had been refreshing themselves more than usual at the *wódki* shops, few of the candles even approached the perpendicular. Wax was dripped and hair was singed, and many a hole was burnt in many a peasant's best coat.

Over the altar there hung a gloomy and terrific representation illustrative of eternal torments; and upon this painting all the eyes of young and old hung with an irresistible fascination—for to the Polish peasant his religion is nothing, if it is not a religion

of terror. The Polish peasant has a broad mind, and requires to be treated by broad means. Such feeble pictures of hell as show nothing more dreadful than seas of melted fire or commonplace coils of snakes, could not hope to intimidate an untutored Polish mind. Something much more distinct and tangible is required, as the priests have found out long ago; and therefore it is that the altar-piece in almost every peasant church shows hell as represented by innumerable devils, each holding a pitchfork, while upon the point of each pitchfork there struggles at least one victim, with starting eyes and foaming mouth; and as a culminating touch to the situation, every devil spits fire into every victim's face. Not even a Polish peasant can misunderstand this; and he kneels cowering and staring, while the salutary reflection forces itself upon his mind that if he drinks too much *wódki*, or beats his wife too often, or steals more than is reasonable of his neighbour's *kasza*, thus will he be treated—devils, pitchforks, and all.

The closely-packed peasants, the sputtering candles, the perfume of *wódki*, and the scent of incense, combined to an unpleasant degree. It was a relief to taste the evening air again. The ceremony had lasted long, and the sun was near setting, when Kazimir, having taken leave of his brother, turned his face homewards.

Whether it was little Wandusia's death that had

depressed him, or whether the devils and their pitchforks had affected him so deeply, certainly Kazimir rode along in a gloomy and dejected mood. He began to think over the week that he had passed in his brother's house; he began to picture to himself again that figure in deep mourning that had stood beside him this afternoon. Restlessly he asked himself, when should he see her again? To-morrow? The day after? How soon could he go again? There was a voice which said within him,—Never; go never again! What right had he to go to his brother's house since he was in love with his brother's wife? For he saw now that he loved her more desperately and more madly than he had loved her four years ago. It was easy to wish now that he had thrust back the olive-branch held out; but the olive-branch had been taken, and it had wounded him more deeply than the point of a warlike lance could have done. "But I need not go back there for the present," thought Kazimir, with a desperate resolution. "I will stay away a month, or a fortnight, and perhaps I shall feel cooler then." And he immediately began to draw pictures in his mind of Xenia; there could be no harm in dwelling on them, since he was not to see her for so long. Only the pictures had grown more confused. Was he to think of her as crying by the deathbed of her child, or as smiling over her diamond bracelet? In both pictures

she looked equally beautiful, but they would not remain distinct. And again and again a third picture, more confused than the others, would force itself before his mind. It seemed to him that it was Xenia whom he had seen on her deathbed, with the violet-wreaths all around her, and that smile of heavenly innocence on her face, and the fancy clung to him that it was Xenia whom he had kissed, and that it was a farewell kiss that he had given. And yet it was not Xenia who had been laid to rest in that little cemetery beside the wooden church. Kazimir turned in his saddle and looked back towards the place he had left. There stood the round brown towers, and a blaze of crimson sunset flamed behind them. The sky was brilliant and dazzlingly red. He had not seen so fine a sunset for long, he thought, as he turned his head and rode on.

He did not think of the sunset again until ten minutes later, when he came upon a group of peasants standing at a turn of the road. There was, amongst others, the peasant-bride, who had waited at the church door; only now she was in tears, and her bridegroom was drunk, and her periwinkle-wreath lay fading in the ditch.

Upon all the faces there shone a red reflection, and the same red light was dancing on the tree-tops.

Kazimir, turning again, perceived that the sunset,

instead of fading, had become finer than ever, which was contrary to the habit of sunsets. Neither had it the calmness of a sunset; for the crimson blaze flickered as it rose and fell, and the brilliant flames seemed almost as though they were really flaming.

"*Wielki Pozar!*" the peasants were whispering as they stared; and Kazimir, catching the words, turned his horse, and gazed more keenly towards the west. No, that was no sunset. The peasants were right; it was a fire—a large fire. The Tarajow church was burning; and once a Russian church begins to burn, it would be as hopeful a task to try to extinguish a pile of burning wood. No pile of wood could, in fact, be so conveniently laid for conflagration as these strange edifices, where a spark dropped near the wooden walls can hardly fail to breed destruction. The tears of the bride were explained; for well did she know that, before the church was built up again, her bridegroom would have converted into *wódki* the sum which was to have been their marriage portion. The burning of the Tarajow church had undoubtedly affected one destiny directly. It did not occur to Kazimir to-night, nor did it occur to Lucyan next day, nor to Marcin, nor to any one else, that it might indirectly affect some other destinies.

The Tarajow church had been burnt down several times before, and would probably burn down several

times again. How should they guess that in this fire was forged the first link of a chain which was to weigh heavily upon more than one life?

No prophetic instinct touched Kazimir, as he gazed at the fire; no shiver of apprehension came over him as he rode homewards, and no visions visited him in the night. He was tired, and he slept soundly, and was awakened next morning by a message from Wowasulka. His brother Marcin had taken the fever.

CHAPTER VI.

A SINGLETON.

"It is not good that man should be alone."—Gen. ii. 18.

It was on a fair May morning that Vizia stood, with an open letter in her hand, beside a post of wood painted white. She was alone at Lodniki again, whither she had returned after Wandusia's funeral, and she had resumed that lonely and independent life which so greatly shocked all her friends. That it was a melancholy life to lead, was to be seen from the expression of habitual sadness which had settled upon her face, and that it had been an unprofitable life as well, was evident from the many signs of decayed fortune which were visible all around her. The stables had sunk in ruins; the garden, once planned by Rogdanovics, had for the most part been abandoned to weeds; all, save a few, of the windows were barred up with shutters; what had been in bad condition four years ago was going to wreck now; where

there had been signs of neglect visible then, there was nothing but desolation now. It would have been all but impossible to trace the resting-place of the "Rhizanelkometer," where it lay beside the tree-trunk, so thick had the nettles and the brambles grown in these years. It was a dismal place to live at, a dismal life to lead; and yet hitherto Vizia had clung to it almost with fondness—had revelled in its solitude, and hugged its melancholy to her heart. She had found a bitter comfort when lying awake in winter nights, to listen to the wolf's howl in the forest, or the shriek of the night-bird, as it shot past her window, and to say, "I am alone and unsupported—I owe gratitude to no one; and if I rise, I rise through my own strength—and if I fall, I fall by myself alone."

When Vizia had first formed the resolution of managing Lodniki for herself, she had thought herself most admirably suited for the task; for in her own energy and perseverance she had full confidence. In reality she could not have been more unsuited than she was. Her very energy stood in her way; it pushed her to extremes. She was too obstinate to take advice, too imprudent to weigh her chances coolly, and too proud to confess her failures. She was, in fact, everything which a woman in this position should not be. Not even her friends knew—or if any one had guessed, it could only be Lucyan—to

what straits she had brought herself by this time. The estate had been left by Rogdanovics in an unfavourable condition, and under Vizia's hands it had sunk to a despairing one. Every day for the last three years had seemed to be bringing her nearer to utter ruin; every year the percentage for sums borrowed from the Jews accumulated at a pace as alarming as it was destructive. Lodniki belonged by this time to the Jews almost more than to her.

Such had been her position until within a few months past. Then, all at once, a merciful Providence seemed to have thrown in her very path the means of salvation. The long-talked-of and half-forgotten railway began to be talked of again. The country was stirred with the excitement of the prospect. Intrigues were set on foot, deputations were organised, petitions were written. And even if the petitions were never attentively read, and if the deputations did not really affect the matter one way or the other, the former were at least good outlets for superfluous energy, and the latter were first-rate opportunities for taking little trips to Lemberg and Vienna, paying visits in national costume to ministers and ambassadors; and then, having first spent several days in drinking to the success of the future railway, in expensive wines at first-rate hotels, to return home, bringing such precious crumbs of speech, fallen from ministerial or even imperial

lips, as: "We shall have much pleasure in considering the question;" or, "We can see no serious objection to the fulfilment of your wishes;" or the important verdict of the minister of war, who thought that he was justified in saying that, so far as he could see, in the possible case of a long course of European war (which he trusted was improbable), the railway proposed might prove of some importance. The money spent upon journeys, the paper spent on petitions, and the eloquence spent on addresses during the six months that the railway-fever stood at its height, were far more than were expended in six years of ordinary existence. There was scarcely a member of Parliament left unmolested by entreaties; and there was scarcely a proprietor in that part of the country who was not anxious to prove, and who did not to his own satisfaction prove, that only by passing through his particular estate could the future railway hope to be beneficial to national as well as international interests.

In spite of all this spurious energy, and in spite of the great pleasure which high personages declared they would feel in considering the question, the railway ran a great chance of falling asleep again for another ten years; and might very likely have done so, had the Poles been left to themselves. But they were not left to themselves. An enterprising Belgian Company, which had already laid some hundred

thousand miles of rails in their day—which had made several dozen canals navigable, and several dozen mountains more easily accessible, by its splendid engineering—which was in the habit of buying up a whole street one day, and selling it on the next—and which had contracts with more than half the Governments of Europe,—suddenly took the matter into its hands. It had scented the chance from afar; and stretching out its arm half across Europe, prepared to strike while the iron was hot. Before the Poles had time to cool down from the pitch of feverish excitement to which the smooth-spoken ministers and the Vienna hotel-suppers had worked them, the Frères Longuebourse, or rather their emissaries (for the Frères Longuebourse themselves were two fat, old men, too wheezy even to walk down their own marble staircase), had set foot in the land, and were casting their eyes about them. Nothing could have been more startling than the appearance of these Belgians in this sleepy corner of the earth. Their *nonchalance*, their rapidity, the breadth of their ideas, quite took away the breath of the neighbourhood. These hundred miles of railway, which had been such an awful and such a harrowing question to the country, were mere child's-play, —a *bagatelle*, to be regarded more as recreation than as work for the Frères Longuebourse.

Vizia had at first taken little interest in the railway

question. Of course it must ultimately raise the value of her estate, as it would raise the value of every estate in the neighbourhood. But the railway would take two, perhaps three, years to build—and Vizia knew well that she could not wait so long. Lodniki must be nominally, as well as virtually, in the hands of the Jews, before another year was out. It was only when the proposition was set forth that the line of railway should pass through the Lodniki ground itself, that Vizia suddenly saw a ray of hope. The exact line to be taken by the railway at this point of its course had hung for some time in doubt. More than a dozen different lines had been mooted; but the dozen had now dwindled down to two, and Lodniki was one of the two. Not only this, but Lodniki was the favourite of the two. The Frères Longuebourse had set up a row of posts upon the ground, and they had set up none on the Bruszów line. From the moment that the posts were up—even though the contract was not signed—Vizia felt that she was saved. And her hopes were not unreasonable; for the Frères Longuebourse were not only large in their ideas of railways and canals, but also broad in their notions of payment. A few thousand florins were neither here nor there to the Frères Longuebourse.

They had opened treaty with Vizia for the railway ground, hinting at a sum which, in her present des-

perate strait, quite dazzled her with its magnificence. As yet they had not got beyond hinting, but this morning post had brought her a letter from the Belgian Company, which contained a new and important proposition.

It was this letter which Vizia held open in her hand, as she stood beside the post. She had read it several times over already, and now she was reading it over again, for she could not quite make up her mind whether to the proposition here contained she should say Yes or No. The Company offered to buy the estate entirely. It was an abnormal proceeding; but as Lodniki lay in a long and narrow strip, and the projected line ran the whole length of that strip, the Company, being enterprising, had hit upon the idea as good; more especially as the wood on the estate would be enough to supply timber for the entire line.

It was a good price which they offered, and, on the whole, Vizia leant towards "yes." There was, to be sure, a pang in parting from Lodniki just as it was about to become prosperous, and in relinquishing all ownership of the white posts, which had first brought her hope. But on the other hand it happened, strangely enough, that this lonely life to which she had clung so tenaciously till now, had suddenly become to her own eyes unattractive. She was not quite able to trace since when this change of sentiment had occurred, and

she did not think of asking herself whether the change had come since a certain day, a little while ago, when Kazimir had expressed his opinions on this subject. Feminine independence had lost all its charms in her eyes since then.

By what appeared to be a coincidence, the same morning which brought Vizia's letter brought her also a visit from Lucyan. He found her with the letter still in her hand. "I have just come over to give you the last news of Marcin," he said, as he sauntered across the grass towards Vizia. "He is up for the first time to-day; looks like a ghost of himself, but the doctor says he will recover his strength in a week or two. I wonder whether he will; he is most extraordinarily weak at present. If he does not recover, it certainly will not be for want of medicines; that apothecary's girl is continually in the house with bottles, and boxes, and powders. Ah, you have a letter; don't let me disturb you."

"There is no secret about the letter; you can read it, if you like;" and Vizia held out the paper to Lucyan.

"Just as I thought," said Lucyan to himself, as he took the sheet; "Aitzig is a good spy."

He read the letter very carefully, and returned it. "The Belgians are a business-like nation," he remarked, after a silence. "And the Frères Longuebourse must

be long-headed men," he added, after a second silence, as Vizia made no answer.

"What makes you find that out to-day?" she asked now.

"This letter."

"Really?" said Vizia, coldly, folding up the letter again. She was very much inclined to ask Lucyan what he meant, only that it would appear like asking for his advice, and she hated to do that.

"It accounts for their immense success," continued Lucyan, as though musing. "Always to see a chance for their interest, and never to miss it; that is just the proper way."

"Then you think it would be a good bargain for them?" broke out Vizia. She bit her lip in the next moment, wishing she had not spoken.

Lucyan smiled very slightly, and stroked his black moustache. "A good bargain for them? There can scarcely be two opinions about the matter, I should think. They offer you about two-thirds of what the real value of the estate is, and they get their wood for nothing. Of course, you accept the offer?" he added, turning his eyes upon her sharply.

"Why of course?" inquired Vizia, contradictiously.

"Well, because it is an offer which no woman in your position should refuse."

What did he know of her position? What right had

he to be aware that she was on the verge of bankruptcy? Vizia coloured scarlet with vexation.

"It must be a great relief to you," continued Lucyan, quite calmly, "to have found this convenient opportunity of ridding yourself of Lodniki and its management. I always predicted that it would be so, you know."

Vizia stood crumpling her letter in her hand, and biting her lip. She did not trust herself to answer, for she knew that she could not answer without speaking hotly. The footing on which she stood towards her cousin's husband was a strained and disagreeable footing. Never in all these four years had the coldness between them thawed, even by one degree.

"The woman who would make a good farmer," Lucyan was saying as he stood watching Vizia out of his half-closed eyes, "has not been created yet. No woman has the nerve, the patience, or the coolness for the work."

Vizia could keep silence no longer. "Rather say at once," she answered scornfully, "that all women are fools; I know you believe it, so why not proclaim it?"

"Because I never could think of doing anything so rude," said Lucyan, with an enraging smile. "Besides, you exaggerate my ideas, and do not make allowances for them. One is rather apt to judge

of all women, is one not, by the pattern of one's wife?"

"What have you to complain of in your wife?" asked Vizia, with a flash of the old protecting feeling.

"Oh, nothing; she has quite brains enough for putting on her clothes prettily, and keeping up delightful chatter by the hour; but I should as soon think of discussing a business question, such as this one"—and he motioned towards the letter—"with a two-year-old child as with Xenia. *Que voulez-vous?* One must take women as they are. That I should be discussing such a question with you, should be proof enough that I do not consider you as belonging to the same—let us say category, as Xenia. To return to the question: you have quite made up your mind, I suppose, to say 'yes' t othe Frères Longuebourse?"

"I have not made up my mind to say anything as yet," said Vizia, embittered rather than softened by the implied compliment to her intelligence.

"It was just the other day, was it not," said Lucyan, with a sneer, "that Kazimir was advising you to get rid of Lodniki?"

"Yes, he did advise me the other day," said Vizia, defiantly. "What of it?"

"Oh, nothing," laughed Lucyan; "only that it is so strange to hear a man of that sort setting up to give grave advice upon these subjects. If I were going to

buy a horse, or order a cask of wine, I should certainly ask Kazimir's advice,—but as for anything else!"

"What do you mean by 'a man of that sort'?" she interrupted, choking with sudden passion.

"I do not mean anything which need cause any excitement," said Lucyan, as he contemplated her burning cheeks. "It is nothing so very bad to say of a young man that he has been a little gay—'wild,' some people call it."

"They call it wrong then," cried Vizia, with a passionate flash in her eyes; "every one is wrong who says that he has done harm. Why are you all treating him as though he were a black sheep? Why are you all so condescending and so cool? Why do *you*, in particular, never mention his name without a shrug and a smile of pity? What harm has he done? Can you name it?"

Lucyan made no attempt at naming it: he merely gave another shrug and another smile, as though to say that against feminine arguments he had no defence. Vizia's lips were quivering with excitement, for the rage slowly gathering during these last five minutes had entirely broken through the barrier of her self-control. Lucyan saw it, and begged her to compose herself. The effect was to make Vizia lose the last remains of her composure.

"I will not compose myself; I will speak; and I

will be listened to. It has been burning on my lips many a time to ask you how you dare treat your brother as you do. He is a better man than you are, and you know it; he would have made a better husband to Xenia; she would have been happier with him, and you know that too."

"I know nothing of the sort," said Lucyan, quietly. "Xenia's happiness requires to be fed upon society, diamond bracelets, and Paris toilets; Kazimir would never have understood how to give her these, and I do."

"And in spite of her diamonds and her Paris toilets, I pity her," said Vizia, hotly.

"Take care!" Lucyan raised a warning hand. "Do not let any one hear you say that; people might get false ideas. When a woman pities too much, it usually means that she is jealous."

Vizia stared, scarcely understanding his meaning; it was not easy in the first moment to imagine what possible motive for jealousy, in this sense, she could be supposed to have towards Xenia. But as she stared, she understood. Lucyan's smile and the look in his eyes made it clearer than his words. It flashed upon her now that this man had once been called her suitor; that he had aspired, or had appeared to aspire, to her hand. This was what he meant by jealousy. She was a woman, and therefore she must be jealous

of the position which her cousin held, and which she might have held herself. At the thought, there rose in Vizia's soul such a wave of contempt and repulsion that it quite drowned the hot anger of a minute ago. She wondered at the calmness of her own voice, as, turning her eyes full upon Lucyan, she answered: "I understand you perfectly well; be so kind as to understand me. I never would have married you; I should as soon have become a galley-slave as have become your wife. I know what made you think of me before you thought of Xenia,"—she came a step nearer, and her eyes dilated slowly. "You thought I was the rich cousin, and that she was the poor cousin; you might have made a fatal mistake,—only there was no danger. I never would have married you; you know it."

He knew it; he had known it long ago; he had hated her for it these four long years. Lucyan never forgave an injury, provided that injury was a wound to his vanity; and the contempt and coldness which had met him four years ago, had made his vanity smart sorely. They had been treasured up since then among his list of unforgiven offences. If he hated her for her contempt, he hated her yet more for the sharpness of her sight. He had known that both existed, but this burst of passion revealed them as existent in a degree which he had scarcely suspected.

The freezing coldness of her glance had at least the power to stagger him for a moment. He stood opposite to her in silence, though the smile never faded from his face. Vizia slowly withdrew her eyes, and turned her head away. This burst of reproach had rubbed off a long score she felt, and she breathed the more freely for it. With averted face she stood, waiting for him to speak. It took him about half a minute to recover from the unwonted feeling of surprise, and then he spoke quite composedly, and in quite different words from those which Vizia had expected.

"It strikes me that we have become more personal than we intended, have we not? There is no good in quarrelling over it, you know; and besides, I never quarrel with ladies,—it is against my principles. Are you not perhaps a little tired, over-excited with the cares of management? No wonder you should be anxious to free yourself from all responsibility. I must be going homewards now: shall I send Kazimir to discuss business with you one of these days, and to give you advice?"

"I do not want anybody's advice," said Vizia, sullenly.

"To *persuade* you, then, to sell the estate; to clench your resolution. I should have thought that either advice or persuasion, coming from that quarter, would

have been particularly agreeable. But I am taking up too much of your time, and I really must be going. No messages for Xenia? Good morning;" and he walked away again across the grass.

Vizia, as she stood looking after him, was trembling from head to foot in a fever of passion. His last words had been purposely pointed; and even an edge far less sharp would have sufficed to pierce her sensitive pride. She was not able to recall each one of her excited words, but she understood that she had betrayed herself now,—she did not know that she had betrayed herself long ago. Her secret lay bare before Lucyan. He had dared to taunt her with it; he would dare to taunt her with it again. What torture to her pride! She was clutching the crumpled letter convulsively in her hand,—she looked down at the paper now. If she said "yes" in reply, as Lucyan advised,—and as Kazimir had indirectly advised then,—Vizia's cheek burnt red again. She saw now in what light her motives would be viewed. No; she would decide for herself. If she kept the estate, it would be because she was strong enough to sustain her own position; if she sold it, it would only be because she chose to do so, and not by any means because she had been advised. Meanwhile Lucyan was smiling to himself, as he drove homewards. "She hates me," he muttered to himself,—"she always hated me;" and as he leant back

on the seat of his carriage, there seemed to be scrawled all over the blue May sky the gigantic word "Revenge." There was to his eyes a most extraordinary sweetness about that word just now. "You are very clever, Mademoiselle Vizia," he reflected; "but not quite as clever as I am."

He had told the coachman to drive straight home, but when half-way there he changed his mind, and ordered him to go round by the Tarajow road, and stop at the Propinacya. Arrived there, he got out and inquired whether Aitzig Majulik was in.

Aitzig Majulik was in. A mumbling sound, which Lucyan knew well, told him that it was so. Aitzig was busy with his devotions in a back-room, and had apparently been busy with his *wódki* too. Not drinking it,—Aitzig's temptations did not lie in that direction,—but, on the contrary, taking care that the poor ignorant peasants should not get too much of the demon down their throats; for those bottles and jars filled two-thirds with spirits, and those water-cans alongside, irresistibly suggested a thinning process. The mumbling sound ceased for a moment, as Lucyan entered, and Aitzig, bringing down his eyes from the ceiling, where they had been fastened in an ecstasy of devotion, turned them sharply towards the door. His left arm was bared to the elbow, and bandaged in a strange fashion. He also wore a bandage round his

head, which at first sight suggested a broken skull, or at least a bruised temple. But Aitzig's skull was in unimpaired condition, as were all his mental powers. The strange bandages were nothing but the tablets of the Ten Commandments, technically called *Twillen*, and worn in the orthodox fashion; and the mumbling sound was the recital of those same Commandments —a part of Aitzig's daily devotions.

"Thou shalt not kill.—The gracious Pan wishes to speak to me?" for just then Lucyan entered.

"It is only a minute," said Lucyan. "I have been to Lodniki and seen her. The letter *had* come this morning."

"When Aitzig says that a thing will come, it will come.—Thou shalt not steal.—Has the Pani answered the letter yet?"

"No. Of course if she accepts the proposition then my plans are smashed; but I have been talking to her now, and I think she will not." Lucyan smiled again.

"Thou shalt not bear false testimony against thy neighbour," mumbled Aitzig, nodding at the same time, with his eye upon Lucyan, to show that he was quite keeping pace with the discussion of the subject in hand.

"Are all our plans organised and working properly?" asked Lucyan.

Aitzig, before answering, made rapid work of the

two last Commandments, jumbling up his neighbour's ox, ass, wife, and servant, which he was not to covet, in somewhat unceremonious fashion. Then taking the bandage from his head and arm, he hung up the tablets on a rusty nail in the wall, beside a second rusty nail upon which there hung a bag, made entirely of cloth selvages, (Aitzig had a cousin in the cloth line) which bag contained the most precious of all his garments, his *Tales* or shroud, — the black and silver envelopment in which he went to the synagogue every *Szabas,* and in which he would some day be carried to his grave.

"Then the gracious Pan has quite made up his mind to take this step, and not to mind the risk?" said Aitzig, turning from the wall and pulling down his threadbare sleeve over his skinny arm.

"Yes ; I have quite made up my mind," said Lucyan, with a frown. "Set to work at your mole-work as fast as you can. We have agreed upon all the points, you know."

"Very well, very well,"—Aitzig passed one hand slowly over the other ; "it is worth while risking a little for a fine sum like that, is it not, noble Pan? Hi, hi, hi!"—and Aitzig laughed softly through his nose, and then stood looking at Lucyan from under his deep brows.

Lucyan returned the gaze with outward indifference,

but it was not the same indifference, nor so real an indifference, as that with which he had looked upon the Jew some years ago. Aitzig had been his instrument, and Aitzig knew his secrets, and within these four years there had slowly grown up a certain dread of his own instrument, and hatred of the man who was in his secrets. That dread and that fear had not been there at first, nor had it come all at once; it had been the gradual growth of four years. Aitzig had been one of the steps by which Lucyan had climbed to his present position; but it was not a step upon which it was pleasant to look back; and unless that step and all trace of it were entirely removed, how could Lucyan ever feel sure of his footing on the height? Aitzig was a ragged, dirty, slipshod, threadbare Jew; and yet, to a certain extent, he held the Marszalek in his power. A rumour, a suspicion of that unclean transaction which had passed between them, would have shaken the ground under Lucyan's feet. To be sure, the same blow would strike them both; but the Jew could not fall far, for he stood low already, while for Lucyan the fall would be from a fatal height. And all the more did Lucyan tremble for his position that he knew the envy which it excited; he had read jealousy under many an obsequious smile, and it was not difficult to imagine the cries of exultation which would greet his fall. For the Marszalek, though he

knew he was respected, was too clever to imagine that he was loved.

He might have seen all this before—and to some extent he had seen it—though the full realisation of such things can come but by degrees. He had not quite realised the anxieties, the unrest, the perplexities, which would be the prize of his position. But even in moments when these most oppressed him, he never regretted the price he had paid. The risk was worth running, after all.

Imperceptibly the footing on which he stood towards Aitzig had shifted and changed. Aitzig bent and wriggled and cringed, and behaved as much as ever like a worm under foot; but now the worm had developed a sting, and sometimes that sting was stealthily advanced. The sight of it made Lucyan shudder; for his nerves, which had stood him in such good stead while he was scaling the slippery height, began to fail him a little, now that the height was reached.

It was a very strange glance which these two men shot at each other whenever they met. On both sides the glance was suspicious and fearful. The Jew knew that Lucyan feared him, and wished him out of the way, and for that reason he feared Lucyan. Thus the fear on each side acted and reacted back upon the other, so that each was steadily growing, and had been steadily growing these four years past.

"Aitzig is to set about his mole-work, then," repeated the Jew, still softly chuckling. "And the price for the mole-work is fixed, noble Pan. A fifth of the profit goes into poor old Aitzig's pocket?" He gently stroked his threadbare pocket, in anticipation of the happy moment. It was the same *kaftan* that he had worn four years ago, and it was the identical pocket into which the fifty florins had gone on that July evening on which Lucyan had tended his sick rose. No one, from Aitzig's outward appearance, or that of his household, could have guessed at his improved fortunes. He had not dropped one of his old and unsavoury occupations. He plied all the trades which he had plied before he got the Propinacya, only that he now had the Propinacya on the back of them all. He had bought no fresh pearls for his wife's cap, no new thread plait for his wife's head, no slippers for himself. The solitary piece of extravagance in which he had indulged, was contained in that selvage-bag on the wall. Death is expensive to a Jew who lives long; and Aitzig having lived over sixty years, had worn through two shrouds already. He had undergone a mental struggle of great severity before he bought his third: he had considered the possibility of having the second darned and cleaned, perhaps with a little silver embroidery added; but in the end he had succumbed. The idea of being buried

in a new and faultless *Tales*—a shroud which should be high above all criticism of envious tongues,—this idea was too tempting to be resisted. On the same day that the Marszalek had first hinted at a new stroke of business to be done, Aitzig had, on the strength of that hint, indulged himself in a new shroud.

"The fifth part, Pan?" said Aitzig again.

"I suppose so," answered Lucyan, with a touch of impatience. To any other Jew it would have been the twentieth or the fiftieth part; but towards Aitzig his position was precarious, and yet he dared employ no other instrument but Aitzig alone. They had fought a battle, of course, before they came to terms; only this time there had been no kicking out of the door, and no dragging in again by the scruff of the neck; and though Lucyan had begun by offering the twentieth part of the profit, he had been forced to close at the fifth.

"And the gracious Pan will give Aitzig a piece of paper — just a little piece of paper — to say that he promises this sum?" suggested the Jew, insinuatingly.

"Nonsense," said Lucyan. "It will be time to talk of that when the work is accomplished. There is plenty to do first before you have earned your money. What have you heard about the land-surveyor?"

"The Belgians are going to take a native engineer—

so has Aitzig heard,—to survey the land once again, and report."

"Which engineer will that be? Everything depends on the man."

"It might be old Hunski," said Aitzig, reflectively, "unless he has the gout worse than usual."

"Old Hunski would never do," said Lucyan; "he is a pattern of integrity. Who else is there, Aitzig?"

"There is Mulsków yet, noble Pan, but he is obstinate, and has a furious temper; and there is Reynadski, a red-haired gentleman with whiskers; but he is as sharp-nosed as a fox, and of a mistrustful nature. Then there is Asinski. *He* is not sharp-nosed; but I fear, Pan, that even should his will be good, he will make a mess of the thing, for he is stupid—*Gott und die Welt*, he is stupid!"

"A little stupidity would do no harm," remarked Lucyan.

"I know the man," said Aitzig, with a chuckle—"I know the man to suit the noble Pan; a little stupid, a little heavy, a little awkward."

"And his soft point? What is it? Will it have to be money again?" asked Lucyan, grudgingly.

"Hi, hi!" laughed Aitzig. "The noble Pan does not like to take money from his pocket; but the noble Pan will be happy to hear that money would

not do it safely with that man. He is of a grateful nature, a soft nature, that gentleman."

"What will do it, then?" asked Lucyan, ignoring the implied taunt which he dared not resent.

Aitzig reflected deeply. "There is another way," he said. "Now, if the gracious Pan would tell the gracious Pani to put on a pretty dress on the day when that land-surveyor comes, and to laugh a little (she has a beautiful laugh, the gracious Pani), and make merry——"

"Ah, I see," said Lucyan, struck with the idea. "Very good. Is the man married or not?"

"Oh, is he not married?" cackled Aitzig.

"I understand. His wife is ugly?"

"Frightful!"

"Bad-tempered?"

"A fury."

"I understand," said Lucyan, again; and he rubbed his hands. "I will do my part, and you do yours. See that no other man but this one is sent down to survey. You can manage it, I suppose?"

"Aitzig will do his best," said the Jew; "and even if the wrong man starts," he added, reflectively, "the wrong man need not arrive. Are there not wheels in every carriage, and screw-nails in every wheel? And for what are screw-drivers unless to take them out? Hi, hi!"

CHAPTER VII.

PAY TWO TO MY QUEEN.

"The Queen of Hearts she made some tarts,
All on a summer's day."
—*Nursery Rhyme.*

SOME weeks after the conversation last recorded, Kazimir, having ridden over to Wowasulka, found Xenia occupied in, what she called, making rose-jam—that is to say, gathering roses in the garden, with the assistance of a short-legged, long-faced, and tall-hatted man, perfectly unknown to Kazimir.

In spite of many and excellent resolutions to the contrary, this was by no means the first, or even the second or the third time, that Kazimir had ridden this way since the day of Wandusia's funeral. In fact, the less that is said about Kazimir's resolutions at present the better, as he himself had discovered—for he had given up making any at all.

"Xenia is busy with the rose-jam," said Madame Torska, the elderly aunt, whom Kazimir encountered

alone in the drawing-room. She looked at him rather nervously as she said it, and looked from him to the door, as if weighing her chances of escape. Madame Torska had never been able entirely to get over the impression produced by Kazimir's first appearance through the bushes on the eve of the wedding-day: she had persisted ever since in treating him as a painful subject. Besides, she had a rooted dislike to young men in general—a distrust of the genus as a whole—which perhaps was the reason of her liking for Lucyan. For Lucyan was not, and never had been, a young man in the true sense of the word. He had no passion, no pride, no temper even; he was young, only because he happened to have passed no more than twenty-eight years in the world.

"What a pity!" said Kazimir, when he heard of the rose-jam; for the idea not unnaturally suggested the kitchen and steaming caldrons. Then, with forced politeness (for she dreaded the fury of his temper), Madame Torska asked him to be seated, and grew nervous when he took a chair, which she considered perilously near to her own; and she attempted to keep up a little frigid conversation, although she fixed her eye firmly on his sword, and held the paper-cutter concealed under the table, for fear of a sudden outbreak.

"Do you not think it would be safer—better," she

corrected, hastily, for fear of irritating him—"if you were to join the others in the garden?"

Kazimir, being only too delighted to hear that the jam was being made in the garden, and not in the kitchen, acted very promptly upon this hint; and entering the back-garden, where cabbages and beetroot and rose-bushes grew, found, as has been said, Xenia gathering roses, while a short-legged gentleman held the basket for her.

The legs of the short-legged gentleman were very short indeed; the length of his face and of his hat, taken together, must have quite come up to the height of his lower members. He was freckled, he was bashful, and he was more than moderately awkward; for every now and then the basket slipped from his hands, and he made snatches after it, and failed to catch it, and sometimes caught at his hostess's dress by mistake; and stammered, and begged pardon, and panted, and finally went down on his knees on the top of the beetroots, and picked up the roses again, putting as much gravel as roses back into the basket, in the excess of his inconvenient zeal. Kazimir, watching from a little distance, did not know whether to be more provoked at the unknown individual's clumsiness, or entranced at the sweet patience with which Xenia bore it. She never lost her temper once.

"You are not used to holding a basket," she laughed

with mock reproval. "Do you never help your wife when she makes rose-jam?"

"She never makes rose-jam," said the unknown gentleman's thick voice.

"Dear me!" Xenia was so struck with surprise at the idea of the unknown gentleman's wife never making rose-jam, that she was obliged to stand still in what happened to be a particularly graceful attitude of surprise, with one arm lifted above her head, as she was pulling down a high rose-branch. "Dear me!" she said, with exquisite pity, "do you mean to say that you never get rose-jam at home?"

"No, nor anything as sweet," said her companion, moodily.

"Perhaps you have no roses in your garden," suggested Xenia, beginning to recover from her surprise, and breaking off the rose which she had stretched to reach.

"Plenty," said the short-legged man; "but they grow nothing but thorns."

Xenia stuck the rose she had just broken off into her hair. "How strange!" she exclaimed, quite innocent of any innuendo; and at the idea of a rose-bush which grew nothing but thorns, she indulged in a peal of silvery laughter.

The peal of laughter was so very silvery, and the pale-pink rose looked so well in her hair, that the

unfortunate gentleman of the short legs forgot once more that he was holding a basket, and had to make snatches after it again, and again to kneel down—on the cabbages this time—and be reproved by charming shakes of the head, and punished by brilliant smiles.

Kazimir, watching this scene and its variations, became more and more puzzled, and also more and more uneasy. Who could this individual be? A gentleman he certainly was not. What could be the meaning of his presence? Why was Xenia making herself so very agreeable to him? "It is only in the nature of her angelic goodness," said Kazimir to himself, unconsciously excusing her; "she is doing what she can to entertain her husband's guest." But all the same, this excessive amiability made him feel restless. It was very nice and perfectly unobjectionable, of course, when such amiability was directed towards himself, for he was her brother-in-law; but was it not possible that in the very excess of her sweetness she might be going further than was prudent with a stranger like this? It was not fair upon her; how could Lucyan leave her this heavy task? Where was Lucyan?

Lucyan was in another part of the garden, watering his flowers. He could not possibly leave off the watering, he explained to Kazimir; Xenia was quite well able to manage the guest for herself. Who was the man? Oh, he had come over to Tarajow on business;

Lucyan believed he was one of those engineers who were overrunning the country at present; he was very *gauche,* poor man. And then Lucyan had to make a rush with the rake at Trappisto, who was preparing to bury a stolen bone in the best flower-border. Trappisto, being baffled in his project, returned whence he had come, to the kitchen, where he devoted himself to the sugar which Robertine was preparing for the rose-jam; for Robertine was busy with the less picturesque part of the process. If there was one thing which Trappisto objected to more than another, it was fasting. Never, from the days of his earliest puppyhood, had he been known to refuse anything which, by any stretch of imagination, could be called eatable; and now that he was growing somewhat dim about the eye and somewhat white about the muzzle, his ruling passion showed no sign of forsaking him. Bones or crusts, sugar or potatoes, they all came alike, and all were agreeable. For the rest, he was a dog of much amiability, with a faint but perpetual wag of the tail, like the well-meaning weak-minded smile which hovers round the lips of over-benevolent people. So far his propensities were not to be called monastic; but, to judge from his grave-digging powers, he had something of the trappist in him, all the same. It was this grave-digging which had earned him Lucyan's hatred; and far down in Lucyan's heart there was

registered a vow that if ever he could do that dog a bad turn, that dog should not escape without it.

Leaving Lucyan to rescue his pink and scarlet geraniums, Kazimir went back to where Marcin was sitting by himself. But Marcin could give him no information whatever as to who the short-legged man might be, nor why he was here. Life was a great deal too short, he explained, to ask after people's names: he did not care who came, as long as he was not asked to talk.

Marcin's hand was hanging over the arm of the chair as he spoke; and Kazimir, looking at it, was struck all at once with the great resemblance it bore to his mother's hand, as he had seen it last. There was that same wasted and half-transparent appearance which had so moved him then, and he could hear the rings rattling against each other, when Marcin moved in his chair. And yet Marcin had got over the fever, had been pronounced convalescent weeks ago; all the doctors agreed on that point. He had always been limp, and lazy, and strange; and it was not easy to trace the small degrees by which he was daily growing limper, and lazier, and more strange.

When Kazimir had fumed for an hour in helpless impatience, he had the satisfaction of seeing the short-legged man putting down the basket, and taking out his watch. What he saw on his watch seemed to

startle him a good deal, for he began with extraordinary energy to hunt for his stick and gloves among the cabbage-beds, during which process he managed to tread into the basket, and kick out its contents once more.

It was so kind of him to have helped—Kazimir heard Xenia saying; and really if it had not been for him she did not know how she could have managed that heavy basket; and he must come back again some day so as to taste the rose-jam he had helped to make; and then Lucyan, who had suddenly appeared on the spot, insisted with apparently a last impulse of hospitality on taking the visitor round the garden. Kazimir saw them walk off together, in the direction of the forest, and then standing still at the foot of the rocky slope, gaze up it and point at different parts with their sticks, and shrug their shoulders, and make other various and incomprehensible gestures. Neither would their conversation have been much more comprehensible, had Kazimir heard it.

"You think it can be managed, then?" said Lucyan, cautiously, watching his companion with a side-glance.

"I think it might be managed, possibly; I do not see any reason why it should not be managed."

"There must be no mention of my name in the transactions, mind; I cannot suffer that."

"There need be no mention, Pan Bielinski; the

Company are not likely to question my report. They don't care very much where the railway is started, as long as it is started soon."

"Does your survey end here?"

"No, my survey ends at Lodniki. You know the lady to whom Lodniki belongs, Pan Bielinski? Do you think there is any chance of her reconsidering her resolution, and selling the estate after all? The Company would have found that arrangement most convenient on the whole."

"There is no chance whatever," said Lucyan, with emphasis. "It is not even worth trying; she is a most extraordinarily obstinate woman, and she imagines that she will get more money by refusing to sell, and pocketing the payment for the railway ground alone—should the railway pass that way."

"Ah yes," repeated the other with a wink, "should the railway pass that way;" and the short-legged man gave a laugh and looked at Lucyan, and Lucyan looked at the short-legged man and gave a responding laugh.

"Yes, she is a most obstinate woman," said Lucyan again; "and besides, her temper is—well, not exactly——"

"Ah yes, not exactly good," finished the other readily. "A sad thing, bad temper is, in a woman," he added with a melancholy shake of the head, for the subject was a familiar one to him.

"You would never guess that she was related to my wife," said Lucyan, watching his companion carefully. "My wife, by the by, has quite set her heart on this little plan of ours: she would be very much disappointed if it came to nothing."

"She shall not be disappointed, if it lies in my power to prevent it," said the short-legged man with fervour, and then he took his leave; and as he drove off in the direction of his bad-tempered wife and his ill-cooked supper, he thought what a pity it was that there was in the world so little of that rose-jam which he had been enjoying this afternoon; and he considered in his mind what an agreeable day he had psssed, what a good dinner he had eaten, how pleasant a man his host was, and what a beautiful woman his hostess, and how glad he should be, could he be the means of obliging them in any way that was possible.

Lucyan, having seen his guest off, returned to the house, and shut himself into his private business-room, for he had letters to write. About the same time aunt Robertine emerged from the kitchen, and having with inexorable severity wheeled Marcin's chair back into the house—for the air was growing cool—disappeared again in the same direction. Kazimir, who was standing a little on his dignity, and who did not chose to look towards the rose-bushes, imagined

that he was alone in the garden, until he heard his name pronounced. "Kazimir!"

He never could hear his name coming thus from her lips without a thrill of mingled pain and joy; and he never could pronounce her name without this same sensation.

The call was obeyed at once, though he looked a little stiffer than usual.

"Will you not come and help me to pick the gravel out of the roses?" asked Xenia. "That poor stupid man has put such a lot in by mistake."

Kazimir began to soften towards the unknown individual as soon as he heard him called stupid. "What is that gentlemen's name?" he asked.

"Oh, I don't know," said Xenia, innocently. "Lucyan said that I was to make myself agreeable to him, and so I did."

"Yes," thought Kazimir, "so she did." And he applied himself rather gloomily to the gravel.

"Why are you so sulky to-day?" asked Xenia, after a minute. "Are you in a bad humour?"

"Not now," said Kazimir, starting as their hands touched for a moment in the basket.

"But you were sulky before," persisted Xenia, plunging her fingers into the rose-leaves. "I saw it by your shoulders."

"You were so busy," said Kazimir, still with the

faintest shade of stiffness, "that I don't think you could have seen either me or my shoulders."

"But I did; and it is very rude of you to contradict me,—and," pouted Xenia, with a quivering lip, "I can't bear anybody to be angry with me ever."

"I have never been angry with you in my life," said Kazimir, hotly: "yes, but I have once, only once"—he bit his lip, regretting his imprudent words, and afraid of having confused her. But Xenia did not appear confused; she went on playing with the rose-leaves quite composedly.

"Oh, you have been angry with me more than once," she laughed, preparing to count on her fingers. "The first time was because I went to Krakow for the end of the carnival; don't you remember?"

"I remember quite well," said Kazimir, beginning to lose all sight of prudence, and incautiously putting his finger on the edged tool which lay so close to his grasp. "I have been angry with you, and you have been angry with me,—is that so?"

"Angry?" repeated Xenia, doubtfully, for anger was a sensation which lay outside the reach of her power. "I don't think I was ever angry exactly; but I remember that I was provoked with you once."

"What about?"

"About—about"—Xenia looked down, then looked

up with a laugh—"about a pretty widow with golden hair."

Kazimir's face darkened. "Do you want me to deny that again?"

"Why do you keep her dog, then?" asked Xenia, with a teasing smile.

"Poor Trappisto!"—and Kazimir stooped to stroke the yellow head lifted towards him. "Nobody cares for you, Trappisto, but me."

"Oh, he is dirtying my dress!" cried Xenia; "please, send him away! What has become of the pretty widow herself?"

"She married two years ago," said Kazimir, throwing a stone after the retreating Trappisto. It was the first piece of unkindness which Trappisto had ever experienced at his master's hands; and in the astonishment it caused him, he stopped wagging his tail, and stared back at Kazimir reproachfully.

"Oh, she is married! Then I shall allow you to keep her dog;—poor dog! Do you think he would like a lump of sugar? I shall give him one this evening."

"Then you believe me now?"

"Yes; I am not going to be angry with you any more, and you must not be angry either about my having gone to Krakow that time."

"Oh no," said Kazimir, with a sigh. He was a

little startled at the way in which she clung to that dreaded subject.

"I really could not help going," she explained, for she evidently considered that having gone to Krakow was a far graver offence than having married his brother. "It was only on account of the ball in the salt-mine, you know; they only give one about once in ten years."

"I suppose so," said Kazimir, with his face turned away. The word "salt-mine" coming from her lips gave him somehow a painful shock.

"It was a very good ball," said Xenia; "what a pity it was that you could not stay for it!"

"A great pity," he echoed, mechanically. This sudden reserve seemed to displease her.

"You must have forgotten all about that time," she said, with a shrug. "Why do you never speak of the salt-mine?"

"Because you forbade me to mention it," he said, in a tremulous voice, not trusting himself to look at her yet.

Xenia broke into a rippling laugh.

"But that was before I married, you know. There is a great difference between a girl and a married woman,—don't you think so?"

"Yes, a great difference," said Kazimir. It struck him as so very strange that it should be she now who

was able to talk of the salt-mine with composure, while it was he who shrank from the mere mention of the word.

They had abandoned the rose-basket by this time, and were sitting on one of the rustic benches which adorned this back-garden.

"I have often wanted to ask you before," began Xenia, growing a little more embarrassed—but not so embarrassed as to prevent the full play of her eyes,—and beginning to pull forward one of her loose curls,—"I have often wanted to ask you whether you have still got that blue camellia which I gave you off my dress; or perhaps you have thrown it away long ago?"

"The crystal flower, you mean?" To Kazimir it had been a "crystal flower" all these years; he scarcely recognised it under its technical name. "Yes, I have it still."

Xenia looked relieved. "But—don't you think that one ought to give those things back? One always does, I think,—and I have a coin of yours, you know." She began slowly detaching a small coin from her watch-chain.

Kazimir made no answer: but he drew out his pocket-book and opened it. This crushed, flattened, and shapeless mass, with nothing but blotches of gum remaining to show where the crystal-powder had once clung,—could this really be the same glistening flower

which had dazzled Kazimir's eyes with its beauty and its brilliancy, that carnival-night in the salt-mine? He had looked at it often since; but never, even to his eyes, had the blue camellia appeared so crushed, so flattened, and so shapeless, as it did to-day. After all, there was nothing to wonder at; things must take their natural course. The camellia-petals were of cotton fabric of an inferior quality, and the *poudre cristalline*, recommended by the 'Journal des Demoiselles,' had been a rather cheap compound—for those were Xenia's economical days, when, held under strict guardianship, she believed herself to be poorer than her cousin Vizia. The ball-dress had been copied in the cheapest of materials, and the *parure* of camellias had drifted long since into the hands of some old-clo' Hebrew,—all except this one flower, which, treasured in Kazimir's pocket-book, had survived till now. Kazimir's pocket-book had a strap round it, and the camellia was many-petalled; therefore it was perfectly unreasonable of him to expect that, after four years' time, the camellia should emerge from the pocket-book as fresh and as crisp as it had been when first it was laid there,—it is only true gold or true stones that can resist the rubbings of the world. And yet Kazimir was conscious of this unreasonable disappointment to-day.

"Dear me!" said Xenia, with a laugh, "how ill you have used that flower! It is so spoilt now that you

won't mind giving it back. Look, the crystal is all gone!"

"Yes, the crystal is all gone," he said after her; but it was at her that he looked, and not at the flower.

"And the coin,—you really want it back? It would be better, I suppose, would it not?" She held it out towards him doubtfully, then withdrew it; held it out a little way again, blushed, laughed, glanced at him under her lashes, and shrugged her shoulders, with another laugh; and in the middle of it all, Kazimir, of a sudden, understood what it meant. She was flirting with him, laying herself out for his admiration. He had been slow in seeing it, and reluctant to see it; but he could be blind no longer. He was ready to kiss the very ground she trod on, for she had been his ideal of womanhood,—and now she was angling playfully for his compliments; every look of her eyes made him thrill with delight,—and now she was darting him coquettish glances, and laughing as she watched their effect.

The shock of pain was so great that it took from him for a moment all the sense of his surroundings. Never till now had he been so conscious of the change in Xenia,—of the difference between the Xenia of now and the Xenia of four years ago. She had hardened without deepening,—she had lost the exquisite freshness of mind and manner which had given the finish-

ing-touch to her beauty. That germ of affectation, that budding vanity, then only peeping out, had since grown strong and firm in root. Even those tiny tricks of manner, so entrancing in the unconscious girl—even the shy toying with her curl, and half-pettish shrug of her shoulder—had lost their charm. Her shyness had been rubbed off long ago; and yet she still toyed with her curl, and still shrugged her shoulder,—perhaps from force of habit, perhaps because she had found out that it was becoming. But the effect was no longer the same: it had hardened along with the rest.

Some, although not all of this, Kazimir recognised. His idol was no longer of pure gold; but his idol was still so beautiful that its beauty held him a slave. The woman he loved had faults—and to-day, for the first time, he had recognised those faults; but his love was not shaken, or he thought it was not shaken. He could forgive her even this. The pain of the discovery he had made seemed only to help him to realise more vividly the surprising force of his own passion.

Plunged in a whirl of bewildering thoughts, he started at the sound of Xenia's voice beside him.

"Since we are giving back things," she began now, a little nervously this time, it struck Kazimir, "don't you think we ought to give back everything? There were those letters, you know——"

"We wrote no letters," said Kazimir, in surprise.

"No,—but you wrote some to Lucyan, and Lucyan wrote some to you."

"Yes," said Kazimir, still puzzled.

"Well, had you not better give them back?"

"If he wants them, of course; but what can he want them for?"

"I don't know; he might want them, you see; and it is not only the letters,—there is also a paper which he sent you once—something about the Propinacyas, I think it was."

"A copy of the lease," said Kazimir; "is that what you mean?"

"Yes, that was it, I think."

"Did Lucyan tell you to ask me for these papers?"

Xenia played with her watch-chain, and grew confused. "Not exactly, rather; I was not to say anything about him. Lucyan said——" she broke off, hastily correcting her mistake, and looked nervously about her.

Kazimir sat silent, puzzled, and a little suspicious. He thought of the short-legged gentleman, and he wondered whether Lucyan had also told her to make herself agreeable to her brother-in-law. "She is as transparent as crystal," he said to himself; but in that same moment he remembered having once, a little while ago, expressed this sentiment to Vizia, and

Vizia had answered him curtly, "She is as transparent as shallow water." It was an unkind answer to have given (Vizia had been ready to bite out her tongue the moment after she had said it), and the remembrance of it troubled Kazimir just now.

"Lucyan shall have the papers," was all he said; but the vague suspicions which her strange request had awakened were not at rest.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

PRINTED BY WILLIAM BLACKWOOD AND SONS.

133

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS-URBANA
3 0112 045853097